

ANDREW THOMSON (1779-1831)  
LEADER OF  
THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL IN SCOTLAND

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by  
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To

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# ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Title of Thesis Andrew Thomson, 1779-1831, Leader of The  
Evangelical Revival in Scotland

Throughout the course of Scottish Church History there have been many important movements which have brought the Church of Scotland to her present state. Not the least of these was the Great Disruption in 1843. Much has been written concerning the causes of this disruption but too little notice has been made of one of the great evangelical leaders of the immediate pre-disruption period, Dr. Andrew Mitchell Thomson.

The contribution which Thomson made to the Church was an important one and commands serious study. This thesis is an attempt to present the man and his work in relation to the Evangelical Revival in the Church of Scotland at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century.

His activities were many and varied, and most of them are mentioned in this work. Those that have a direct bearing on the Evangelical Revival are carefully examined and considered.

Church historians have written very little concerning Andrew Thomson, as he was overshadowed by Thomas Chalmers and the momentous events relating to the Disruption of 1843. There is only one brief biography of Thomson, which is very inadequate. Unfortunately, little information is available concerning his early life and interests.

This thesis is divided into two major parts, plus an evaluation. The first part is treated rather briefly, however, because of the lack of primary material and the fact that the second part covers the portion of Thomson's life which bears directly on the Evangelical Revival in Scotland during the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century.

Thomson's influence upon this Revival is demonstrated in every phase of his life and work. Serving as an able and

Use other side if necessary.



distinguished minister, as editor of an influential evangelical periodical, and party leader in the Church, he rendered a two-fold service to evangelical religion. He took away the reproach from what had been called the narrow, the pietistic, the fanatical party, and formed a strong Evangelical body to face the Moderate ranks. He gathered and marshalled the younger men in the Church who were willing to fight for spiritual independence and Christian rights inside the Establishment.

His zeal in promoting the religious culture and intellectual improvement of the people, a characteristic which was not so pronounced in the earlier evangelicals, served to render the Evangelical Revival more acceptable in certain areas of society.

Thomson was a reformer and his often controversial writings reflect that character. A careful analysis of his speeches and his writings reveal that their distinctive feature is their powerful and sifting argumentation. His aim often appeared to be to find and refute error, and in the passion of debate he sometimes spoke and wrote more severely and harshly than the occasion warranted. He sometimes crossed the boundry line of fair debate; he occasionally took an exaggerated view of his subject, and too often penned unguarded expressions in regard to those with whom he differed. It may be said that considering the stirring nature of the warfare in which he was engaged, and the fact that an ardent temper seems to be an inseparable element in a mind fitted for enterprises of noble daring, some of his actions were not surprising, but are by no means to be commended. He has been compared with Luther, and Knox, and Melville; and despite his occasional injudicious conduct, he greatly helped to bring his Church to a renewed awareness of her protestant heritage.



## PREFACE

Throughout the course of Scottish Church History there have been many important movements which have brought the Church of Scotland to her present state. Not the least of these was the Great Disruption in 1843. Much has been written concerning the causes of this disruption but too little notice has been made of one of the great evangelical leaders of the immediate pre-disruption period, Dr. Andrew Mitchell Thomson.

The contribution which Thomson made to the Church was an important one and commands serious study. This thesis is an attempt to present the man and his work in relation to the Evangelical Revival in the Church of Scotland at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century.

His activities were many and varied, and most of them are mentioned in this work. Those that have a direct bearing on the Evangelical Revival are carefully examined and considered.

Very little has been written concerning Andrew Thomson as he was overshadowed by Thomas Chalmers and the momentous events relating to the Disruption of 1843. There is only one brief biography of Thomson, which is very inadequate. Unfortunately, little information is available concerning his early life and interests.

In Part II, Chapter II, little is said of his activities in the work of the Presbytery, as the records for the period covering the most active part of his life have been lost: The Minutes of Edinburgh Presbytery that encompassed the years from 1811 to 1833.

The author has tried to present Thomson and his work from an unbiased viewpoint, though he is aware that his presentation may have been influenced by Thomson's forceful personality and strong convictions.

This thesis is divided into two major parts. The first part is treated rather briefly, however, because of the lack of primary material and the fact that the second part covers the portion of Thomson's life which bears directly on the Evangelical Revival in Scotland during the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century.

The author is particularly interested in Scottish Church History, inasmuch as his Presbyterian Church in the Southern part of the United States bears such close kinship with the Church of Scotland. This has been, for him, a very rewarding study and he will always hold in high esteem his Scottish Presbyterian heritage.

I am deeply indebted to many who have offered invaluable assistance in the preparation of this thesis. To my

supervisor, the Reverend Professor J. H. S. Burleigh, D.D., B.Litt., Secretary to the Post-Graduate School of Theology, University of Edinburgh, I offer my sincere gratitude for his guidance and encouragement. I would like to express my appreciation to the Librarians and Staff Members of the various libraries I have utilized: The New College Library, University of Edinburgh; The Edinburgh University Library; The Church of Scotland Library; The National Library of Scotland; The Signet Library, Edinburgh; and The Library of the University of St. Andrews. I am also grateful to Miss Marguerite Wood, M.A., Ph.D., former custodian of the burgh records in the City Chambers, Edinburgh, for her help in my research on the growth and development of the New Town of Edinburgh. My cordial thanks must also be expressed to the Reverend Professor William C. Robinson, B.D., Th.D., Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia, U.S.A., who offered invaluable suggestions.

The spelling and punctuation throughout this thesis, with the exception of direct quotations from British sources, follow standard American usage.

John Watson Craven

1 March 1955

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**INTRODUCTION**

**THE CHURCH IN SCOTLAND AT THE  
BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH  
CENTURY**

## ECCLESIASTICAL ATMOSPHERE

The contribution which Andrew Thomson made to the Evangelical Revival within the Church of Scotland can only be understood when something is known of the state of the Church in the period in which he lived.

From the time of the Revolution Settlement in 1688 to the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, many changes led the church away from the reformation principles set forth by Knox and exemplified in the lives of the Covenanters. The secular side of Scottish life, long repressed during the period of religious and political turmoil, began to assert itself and the national mind and energy began to expand in the directions of industry, commerce, literature, and philosophy.

During the Eighteenth Century Scotland felt the full force of the reaction to the Calvinistic interpretation of the universe and of human life. A manifest dislike was expressed to the intellectual methods of the theologians and the revolt against the theological ideal culminated in the predominance of rationalism. Faith was placed in the power of speculative reason to obtain ultimate truth. Many thinkers said, in effect: "I will believe nothing I cannot understand, and I only understand what conforms to the acknowledged rules of logic and can be explained to anyone



of normal intelligence."<sup>1</sup>

This reaction was reflected through a movement in favor of English Deism, which seemed to many of the clergy to present a more generous sphere for the activities of the mind than the Calvinism of the Confession of Faith. The moral discussions, to which many of the English clergy addicted themselves, became fashionable in Scotland; and this, along with the Deistic conception of life as expounded by Francis Hutcheson of the University of Glasgow, gave impetus to the development in the church of what was known as Moderatism.<sup>2</sup> In his autobiography, Alexander Carlyle bears witness to the intellectual enthusiasm which resulted from the efforts of Hutcheson, and his liberal-minded colleagues, to carry into Scotland the torch of reason, which a century before had been lit by Decartes and Locke.<sup>3</sup>

The people of Scotland had cherished the most ardent zeal for those doctrines of religion which are recognized in the church standards. The older Presbyterian clergy who had survived the persecution of the Stuarts preached those

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Ross Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1937), pp. 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Craik, A Century of Scottish History (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1901), Vol. II, pp. 183-184.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Carlyle, Autobiography, edited by John Hill Burton (London: T. N. Foulis, New Edition, 1910), p. 91.

doctrines in the most decisive manner, but it was not long until an alteration took place in the doctrinal views of many of the younger clergy.

#### A. MODERATES

Sir Henry Moncreiff Wellwood points out that:

There was certainly at this time in Scotland, a class of preachers who, besides the absurd affectation of bringing their public instructions from Socrates, Plato, or Seneca, rather than from the morality of the gospel, distinguished themselves by an ostentatious imitation of Francis Hutcheson and the Earl of Shaftsbury.<sup>4</sup>

Calvinism, with its doctrine of election, met with opposition from the theological rationalism of the Humanistic movement which postulated a God whose ruling desire was the happiness of all. Man was represented as supplied with two special faculties, conscience and reason, and by means of these he could gain an adequate knowledge of nature and her laws. "Natural knowledge, thus became the watchword of the theological rationalism, as opposed to the supernatural paternalism of the Calvinists."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Moncreiff Wellwood, Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine, D.D. (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1818), p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Hector MacPherson, Scotland's Battles For Spiritual Independence (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1905), p. 137.

The antagonism which developed between Calvinism and Deism had practical results. As a starting point of a supernatural life, Calvinism holds to the idea of regeneration while Deism rests upon culture. Consequently, doctrinal teaching was relegated to a secondary place, with ethical teachings occupying the place of predominance. The clergy who were thus influenced by humanism were known as Moderates and professed to be tired of theological disputation and political turmoil. They "yearned for a social order in which reigned common-sense, good breeding, good fellowship, and intellectual pursuit of truth."<sup>6</sup> Man was endowed with reason which only needed to be cultivated by intellectual methods in order that an improved social state might be brought about.

Their creed remained the Confession of Faith but a wide latitude of opinion was allowed.

. . . it seems clear that for . . . the "moderates" within the Church, religion was little more than a sentiment. If one cannot discover much unorthodoxy, it is because dogma has ceased to be a living interest. The typical "moderate" did not think of questioning the Westminster Confession: his attention was taken up with moral essays, with writing history or poetry or drama, with the scientific cultivation of potatoes, with the life of a cultured gentleman like that recorded in the fascinating Autobiography of Alexander Carlyle (1722-1802).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>7</sup> G. D. Henderson, The Claims of The Church of Scotland (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1951), p. 52.

Calvinism had placed a strong emphasis on the abiding presence of God, the insufficiency of reason, and the constant need of supernatural help. Rationalism, in contrast, exhibited a belief in the aloofness of the Deity, the self-sufficiency of man, and a reliance upon natural methods for religious and social betterment.<sup>8</sup> The clergy who were affected by this thought believed that what was needed for man was not so much the implanting of a new nature as the careful cultivation of the old.<sup>9</sup> The Moderates were somewhat justified in their reaction since the church had not welcomed the revival of learning and literature, but had remained suspicious of anything that seemed alien to the theocratic ideal.

The Moderate influence enabled Scotland to take part in the intellectual revival that was sweeping across Europe and when the Nineteenth Century began the country was well advanced in the fields of history, literature, and philosophy.

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<sup>8</sup> In this respect, Cunningham says: "It has been frequently said, that a large proportion of the Moderate clergy were Rationalists . . . . No doubt a skeptical tendency was common among the educated classes. The wit of Voltaire and the philosophy of Hume had produced this result. Some of the clergy were infected with the prevailing spirit, and began to doubt the peculiar doctrines of the faith." John Cunningham, The Church History of Scotland (Edinburgh: James Thin, Second Edition, 1882). Vol. II, p. 413.

<sup>9</sup> W. G. Blaikie, The Preachers of Scotland (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888), p. 220.

Professor Henderson points out:

The Moderate school did something to bring the church in line with the spirit of the great age of reason which had dawned with the rise of modern philosophy and science under the influence of Descartes, which owed much to rival Scottish thinkers, David Hume and Thomas Reid. Toleration and freedom of thought and enquiry were the marks of the time; but there was little encouragement to apply such principles in the sphere of Theology . . . . (italics not in original).<sup>10</sup>

Macinnes comments:

Moderatism made notable contributions to the life of the nation. Its achievements in literature, history and philosophy were varied and splendid. On the practical side, Moderate ministers were not seldom the pioneers in agricultural science. Even in theology, the province in which Scottish moderatism was reputed to be the weakest, such men as Principal George Campbell of Aberdeen, Professor Leechman of Glasgow, and Principal William Wishart of Edinburgh, gave proof, not always welcome to their more orthodox brethren, of vigorous thinking. But the whole tone of Moderatism, in its constant preoccupation with refinement and good manners rather than with sound doctrine, was hostile to the Evangelical fervour. And Evangelicalism, which flourishes best in the face of antagonism and opposition, was neither slow nor unwilling to discover its chief enemy in a system of thought and life whose minimizing tendencies and studied understatements appeared to many to be the negation of Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this cultural advancement, the power of Moderatism began to weaken when its theory of life failed

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<sup>10</sup> G. D. Henderson, Heritage, A Study of the Disruption (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, Ltd., Second Edition--Revised, 1943), p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> John Macinnes, The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland (Aberdeen: The University Press, 1951), p. 80.

to stand the severe tests imposed on it by such harsh realities as the French Revolution.

The age of reason and enlightenment had not reached the common man, for his problems could not be answered by speculating about a social order working harmoniously under the guidance of enlightened self-interest. Calvinism, with its stern theology and its doctrine of human depravity, proved more true to life than the optimism concerning human nature and the unbounding faith of reason fostered by the Moderates.

In such an age, Moderatism proved helpless. It was decadent, maintaining a tradition without the vital energy of those who had created the tradition. To the panic-stricken it offered no refuge; to the new democratic spirit, it could offer no guidance. Its great days were over.<sup>12</sup>

During the long years of the ascendancy of Moderatism, it made no strong attempts to win the masses. Consequently, with the coming of the new industrial revolution, the people were less interested in ecclesiastical disputations than in the political and social hopes which were awakened by the French Revolution.<sup>13</sup>

The mighty surge of radical ideas which was let loose by the French Revolution, found the moral optimism of

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<sup>12</sup> A. J. Campbell, Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland, 1707-1929 (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, Ltd., 1930), p. 147.

<sup>13</sup> Blaikie, op. cit., p. 268.



Moderatism bankrupt. Men who were seriously concerned about the welfare of the people had to seek deeper for a principle of salvation.<sup>14</sup>

## B. EVANGELICALS

Throughout the Eighteenth Century the Moderates were in the majority but there was an influential minority of Evangelicals, so-called "High-Flyers," who remained the popular party. They had the support of most of the people who were interested in religion and desired a less intellectual and more devotional type of preaching than that supplied by the Moderates.

The popular men were rigidly Calvinistic, giving prominence to the doctrines of election and irresistible grace; the Moderates, if not Arminians, at least kept out of view the peculiar principles of Calvinism. The former dwelt much upon the doctrines of Christianity, and especially upon justification by faith; the latter insisted mainly upon keeping the commandments. They had a peculiar fondness for sermons upon sympathy, good-will, benevolence, honesty, and all the other cardinal virtues.<sup>15</sup>

A major difference between the Moderates and the Evangelicals was their opposing views on the method of placing ministers in vacant parishes. According to the Revolution Settlement of 1690, vacant parishes were to be supplied by a call from the heritors and elders, and under

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<sup>14</sup> Macinnes, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>15</sup> Cunningham, op. cit., p. 413.



this law the appointing of ministers was carried out with quietness and satisfaction for many years. In 1712, however, Queen Anne's Tory Parliament passed an Act, much against the will of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, which restored the right of patronage to the original proprietors; "non-juring and Roman Catholic patrons alone being precluded from exercising their inherited rights."<sup>16</sup> When this legislation was passed, the former act, concerning calls under the Revolution Settlement, was left unrepealed.

Immediate consequences of the Patronage Act were neither visible nor extensive, inasmuch as popular feeling kept patrons from exercising their rights for many years.

The truth is that, during this period, vacant parishes appear to have been, very generally, filled up by the presbyteries, either with the tacit consent of the patrons, even when they lodged their presentations; or, jure devoluto, when they did not present at all.<sup>17</sup>

This state of affairs did not continue, however. And when the patrons began to exercise their right of patronage, much opposition was aroused and many tumults occurred in settling vacant parishes. One part of the clergy acted on the principle that no presentee should be refused by any church. Others, citing the unrepealed act of parliament which required a call from the heritors and elders, insisted

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<sup>16</sup> Macinnes, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> Wellwood, op. cit., p. 435.

that no presentee should be inducted unless he had a majority of these callers. The grounds of difference shifted at different times to some degree, but these were the grounds on which, for many years, a keen contest was carried on in the Church of Scotland, and which divided the clergy into two parties.<sup>18</sup> The "Moderate Party" supported the absolute power of the patron to settle parishes, while the "Popular," or "Evangelical Party" professed to adhere to the Revolution Settlement, requiring a call from the heritors and elders.

As the Moderate party grew in strength, more and more emphasis was placed on the absolute power of the patrons in the settlement of ministers and the discontent of the populace became more acute. Between the years 1739 and 1752, there were no less than fifty-two disputed settlements, many enforced with military support. In the second half of the century the Moderates pressed for absolute subordination to the assembly of all lower courts, particularly in the matter of patronage, but many presbyteries showed an

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<sup>18</sup> The distinction between the Moderates and the Evangelicals was not as clear cut as it has sometimes been reported. Professor Hugh Watt says: "There were shades of Moderatism and shades of Evangelicalism, and while the irrevocably committed were known and had acquired certain distinctive characteristics, a very large proportion were of indeterminate shade. Even in the days when the cleavage was most complete, passage from one party to the other was by no means unknown. Hugh Watt, Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1943), p. 6.

unwillingness to place ministers where there was any indication on the part of the people that they were unwanted. The emphasis which the Moderate Party had placed on patronage, and its lack of emphasis on Evangelical doctrine, did not prove to be in the best interests of the Established Church of Scotland.

Dissent was steadily on the increase. Though the people seldom opposed a presentee whom they disliked, they too frequently, when such a man was forced upon them, abandoned the parish church for the meeting-house. The Seceders were ever on the alert, ready to take advantage of any discontent that had sprung up in the parish. In 1773 the Burgher Associate Synod had fifty-nine congregations, served by forty-three ministers; the Antiburgher Associate Synod had ninety-seven congregations and seventy-seven ministers; the Relief Synod had nineteen congregations and fourteen ministers; the Cameronians had nine congregations, and seven ministers; of independent congregations there were six, so that, besides Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, there were already in Scotland one hundred and ninety Dissenting congregations, although Dissent was scarcely forty years old.<sup>19</sup>

As the influence of the Moderates declined, a new emphasis was brought to bear on the life of the church by the Evangelicals. Though Evangelicalism had been somewhat obscured, it had never died out in Scotland, and as it emerged at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, changes were revealed in its manner and temperament. It was characterized by a milder and more acceptable "enthusiasm" and the illiteracy of the earlier period had largely

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<sup>19</sup> Cunningham, op. cit., p. 414.

disappeared.<sup>20</sup>

In England the reaction against formal rationalism and moral laxity was led by John Wesley. He revolted against the Deism, skepticism, and moral indifference which was so prevalent within the Church of England. He rejected the conception that faith was a cold intellectual conviction and contended for the conception of faith as being an inward sentiment of instinctive feeling.<sup>21</sup>

Both Wesley and Whitefield made many visits to Scotland, and though the immediate response to their preaching was sometimes overwhelming, their movement never caught fire in the land of John Knox and Scottish Presbyterianism. In 1784, after a visit to Scotland, Wesley wrote in his Journal: "I am amazed at this people. Use the most cutting words, and apply them in the most pointed manner: still they hear, but feel no more than the seats they sit upon."<sup>22</sup>

Wesley's successors continued to retain their contact with their many friends in the North. The Haldane movement, embodying many of the Evangelical tenets, had received

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<sup>20</sup> W. M. Taylor, The Scottish Pulpit from the Reformation to the Present Day (London: Charles Burnet and Co., 1887), p. 169.

<sup>21</sup> D. Butler, Wesley and Whitefield in Scotland (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1898), p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> Nehemiah Curnock, editor, The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (London: Chas. H. Kelley, 1909), Vol. VI, p. 499.

stimulus from Simeon of Cambridge.<sup>23</sup>

Rowland Hill, in 1798, "stormed" through Scotland, deploring the "mangled gospel" which, for many Scottish preachers, was nothing but "a hungry system of bare-weight morality."<sup>24</sup>

The Scottish Evangelical movement, however, was primarily one of its own, though there is no doubt the English Evangelicals influenced Scotland by the writings of such Puritan divines as Howe, Owen, and Baxter, whose emphasis was similar to that of the Scottish Evangelicals.

The great leader of the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland during the Eighteenth Century was Principal William Robertson, "one of the ablest and most eloquent men who his country has ever produced."<sup>25</sup> With his retirement in 1780, his party began to decrease in influence, and the Evangelical Party soon began to win decisions in the church courts. After 1830, the Evangelicals continued to hold a definite majority until the Disruption in 1843.

The leaders of the Evangelical Party during the reign of Moderatism were men of ability and influence. The strong

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<sup>23</sup> Alexander Haldane, The Lives of Robert and James Haldane (Edinburgh: W. P. Kennedy, eighth edition, 1871), pp. 181-188.

<sup>24</sup> Cunningham, op. cit., p. 408.

<sup>25</sup> Wellwood, op. cit., p. 462.

Evangelical, John Erskine, was for twenty-six years the colleague of the Moderate Leader, Principal Robertson, in the Old Greyfriars Church of Edinburgh. "As a theologian, Erskine was probably the greatest divine of the Church of Scotland in the latter part of the Eighteenth Century."<sup>26</sup>

His successor as leader of the Evangelicals was Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, D.D., a friend and biographer of Erskine. These were capable and excellent men, but "the man with whose name the Evangelical ascendancy in the Nineteenth Century will ever be associated is Dr. Andrew Thomson."<sup>27</sup> Professor Henderson calls him "the outstanding figure of the Evangelical Revival in Scotland."<sup>28</sup> "He . . . was the acknowledged leader of the reforming party in the church"<sup>29</sup> and ". . . was manifestly sent to revive the evangelical interests within the Church of Scotland."<sup>30</sup>

Other selected testimonies to Thomson's leadership of the Evangelical Revival support this claim.

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<sup>26</sup> C. G. McCrie, The Church of Scotland, Her Divisions and Her Reunions (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1901), p. 109.

<sup>27</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Henderson, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Buchanan, The Ten Years' Conflict (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, New Edition, 1863), Vol. I, p. 176.

<sup>30</sup> N. L. Walker, Our Church Heritage (London: T. Nelson and Sons, New Edition, 1893), p. 40.



They (the Evangelicals) were led by a man whose name represents more, perhaps, than any other . . . the beginnings of Evangelical ascendancy in the church after the long reign of Moderatism . . . . He was exactly the man to take away the reproach from what had been called the narrow, the pietistic, the fanatical party.<sup>31</sup>

Another church historian believed that:

. . . The cause of true religion derived its greatest impulse from those who were raised up to defend and propagate it. They were not only men of intellect and genius, but exalted piety and forceful personality. Since the days of Knox, Melville, and Henderson, the Church of Scotland produced no men like them, till Dr. Andrew Thomson and Dr. Thomas Chalmers appeared.<sup>32</sup>

Walker dares to venture the opinion that:

The raising up of such a leader, at the time he (Thomson) appeared, within the Scottish Establishment, was a providential dispensation as marked in its way as was the call to Martin Luther at the dawn of the Reformation.<sup>33</sup>

A. J. Campbell, a Moderate sympathizer, says that "the conspicuous churchmen of the time were Evangelicals-- Sir Henry Moncrieff, Andrew Thomson, Thomas Chalmers, Alexander Duff."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Peter Bayne, The Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Second Edition, 1894), p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> D. A. Mackinnon, Some Chapters in Scottish Church History (Edinburgh: R. W. Hunter, 1893), p. 149.

<sup>33</sup> Walker, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>34</sup> Campbell, op. cit., p. 167.



PART I

ANDREW THOMSON -- GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Referring to the birth of Thomas Chalmers, in 1780, John Ker remarks: "It was when Moderatism was darkest and the church's children of revival came into the world at the hour of midnight."<sup>1</sup> In this period in the life of the church Andrew Mitchell Thomson was born in the historic town of Sanquhar in Dumfriesshire on the 11th of July 1779.

He was the second son of the Rev. John Thomson, D.D., who was then the evangelical parish minister of Sanquhar, a Scottish burgh famous from covenanting times. The child, who was later to be the leader of the Evangelical Revival forces of Scotland, was born in the town where the famous "Sanquhar Declaration" was signed and proclaimed in 1680.<sup>2</sup> This "Declaration," which the Covenanters affixed to the town cross, was a paper declaring that those who had put it there disowned Charles as their King because he had broken the covenant to which he had sworn when he took the crown. This was a daring act on the part of those who held religious freedom dearer than life, and added fuel to the

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<sup>1</sup> John Ker and Jean L. Watson, The Erskines: Ebenezer and Ralph (Edinburgh: James Gemmell, 1880), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Hume Brown, A History of Scotland for Schools (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1907), p. 473.

raging fires of persecution.

Andrew Thomson found himself in the home of a Scottish minister who was greatly concerned because of the state of the church and who was careful to instill into his family the essence of the Reformation doctrines.<sup>3</sup> Though there is no evidence that in his early years he seriously thought of the Christian ministry as his life's work, he received encouragement and direction from an able and godly father. Along with his older brother, William, he was being prepared for the ministry in the Church of Scotland many years before he entered the University.

In his earliest years he gave evidence of the qualities by which he was afterwards to become distinguished. He was "remarkable for his intelligence, vivacity, and especially for that free, manly, open-hearted character, which, in after life, gave him so strong a hold on the affections of all who intimately knew him."<sup>4</sup>

His mingled humor and force of character was much in evidence while he was still a youth. Thomas McCrie records

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<sup>3</sup> Jean L. Watson, Life of Andrew Thomson (Edinburgh: James Gemmell, 1882), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Watson, "Memoir of the Rev. Andrew Thomson, D.D." Edinburgh Christian Instructor, (Edinburgh: Balfour, Kirkwood and Co., 1810), Vol. 1, p. 2. [Second Series]

one of the most interesting anecdotes of his childhood that can be found:

Mounted on a chair, the back of which served as a pulpit, the lively boy could "take off" on the life of the ministers who came to assist his father at the communion. It is told that the venerable Dr. Fleming of Lady Yester's was present, and enjoyed the exhibition amazingly. 'But Doctor,' observed one of the company, 'he can take you off as well as the rest.' The Doctor insisted on hearing himself. Little Andrew at first stoutly refused, but after great pressing complied. The imitation was complete. The Doctor's face, visibly elongated, and he cried out, 'Stop there, Andrew, yours is a most dangerous faculty.'<sup>5</sup>

When John Thomson moved from Sanquhar to Markinch in Fifeshire in May 1785, his son Andrew was only six years of age. With his brother, William, he attended the parish school where William appeared to be more of a scholar than Andrew. After a few years, however, he began to show a keen interest in his studies and in the work of the church.

In 1796, when he was seventeen years of age, he enrolled in the University of Edinburgh.<sup>6</sup> However, there is no record of his taking any courses that year except the class in Logic under Professor James Finlayson. The following

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas McCrie, The Story of The Scottish Church (London: Blackie and Son, 1875), p. 522.

<sup>6</sup> Edinburgh University Matriculation Roll, 1804-1816. (unpublished). No account of Thomson's education occurs in any of the brief sketches of his life and, after diligent research, very little information could be discovered.

year he studied Humanity under Professor John Hill, author of the quarto volume of Synonymes of the Latin Language and the life of Dr. Hugh Blair. Professor Hill was a man of eccentric character and was very narrow in his habits, but of great acuteness, ready wit, and "admirable skill in clothing conceptions, often original, in English words, always pure and racy."<sup>7</sup>

The same year he studied Greek under Professor Andrew Dalzel. Professor Dalzel was "an apt and elegant scholar" -- "a most amiable and worthy man, and kept his class always in good order, which Dr. Hill never did or could do."<sup>8</sup>

In the following year, 1798, there is no record of Thomson's enrolling in any classes with the exception of Greek II which was taught by Professor Dalzel. In 1799, the University record shows that he took another course in Greek with the same professor, and a course in Mathematics with Professor Playfair.<sup>9</sup> Professor Playfair was a very capable teacher but "by far too scientific for boys."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Robert F. Burns, Life and Times of Rev. Robert Burns (Toronto: James Campbell and Son, 1871), p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Edinburgh University Matriculation Roll, 1804-1816. (unpublished).

<sup>10</sup> Burns, op. cit., p. 15.

It was not until Thomson returned to Edinburgh as minister of the New Greyfriars Church that he received his Master of Arts degree. He matriculated again in the University in 1810 and in 1811, and studied Humanity both years. He was awarded his degree in 1811.

The reasons for the irregularities in his university training are not known and there is no evidence in the university records that he received any formal theological training at Edinburgh, or any of the other Scottish Divinity Faculties.<sup>11</sup> One who knew him well, however, David Dickson, Minister of St. Cuthbert's, Edinburgh, says that "after completing the usual course of literary and theological study at the University of Edinburgh, he was licensed as a preacher of the gospel . . . ."<sup>12</sup> Another writer says that he was well grounded in the historic elements of the faith, since he had learned them through diligent study, under the

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<sup>11</sup> Regular attendance in the Divinity Faculties was not required by the Church of Scotland at this time, but the student was required to present evidence of his adequate knowledge of the history and doctrines of the faith. In 1824, Chalmers introduced legislation in the General Assembly requiring at least one year of formal theological training.

<sup>12</sup> David Dickson, A Sermon Preached in St. George's Church, Edinburgh, on the 20th of February, 1831, being the Sabbath after the funeral of the Rev. Andrew Thomson, D.D., Minister of that Church, including a sketch of his life and character. (Edinburgh: George A. Douglas, 1831), p. 30.

careful direction of "a learned and pious father."<sup>13</sup> He was well acquainted with Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, as is evidenced by his writings for the Edinburgh Christian Instructor.

There is no record of Thomson's impressions and important decisions while attending the University, but he was privileged to have among his professors men of learning and ability. Perhaps the Professor who influenced his alert mind more than any other, especially in sharpening it for debate, was the occupant of the chair of Logic and Metaphysics, Dr. James Finlayson. Professor Finlayson "aimed at being useful rather than brilliant, and sought to give his students a plain and intelligible account of the powers and capabilities of the human mind, with most suitable rules and suggestions for their right improvement and guidance."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> David Walker, The Border Pulpit (Edinburgh: David Walker, 1877), p. 142.

"Besides the instructions of his worthy father, it was Dr. Thomson's felicity to enjoy the intimate friendship of the venerable Sir Henry Moncreiff, who early discovered his rising talents, and freely imparted to him the stores of his own vigorous and mature mind . . . ." Edinburgh Christian Instructor, Vol. 30, p. 135.

<sup>14</sup> Burns, op. cit., p. 15.



## CHAPTER II

### EARLY MINISTRY

For a short period of time between the years 1799 and 1801, Thomson served as a tutor in the home of Sir John Pringle of Stichel House in Sprouston. In a letter from the Rev. William Craig to Miss Jean L. Watson, the writer relates that as Thomson "stood one day on an eminence overlooking the vale of the Tweed, he expressed himself, saying how pleased he would be if his lot should be cast in such a quiet and beautiful neighborhood," little thinking that this was to be his home for the next six years.<sup>1</sup>

Thomson was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Kelso on the 7th of October, 1800. He was presented, by the Duke of Roxburgh, to the parish of Sprouston, in the same Presbytery, on the 24th of July, 1801. On the 11th of March, 1802, when he was twenty two years of age, he was ordained as minister of the Established Church of Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

When Thomson went to the parish of Sprouston he found there about 1100 people, most of whom lived in the two villages of Sprouston and Lempitlaw. His parish was six

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<sup>1</sup> Jean L. Watson, Life of Andrew Thomson (Edinburgh: James Gemmell, 1882), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> John Anderson, Sketches of the Edinburgh Clergy (Edinburgh: John Anderson, 1832), p. 98.

miles long and four miles wide, and bounded on the north by the river Tweed.<sup>3</sup> The church, built in 1781, was situated in the center of the village of Sprouston, as it is today.

The manse, built in 1777, was small but adequate for the young minister, who soon after going to Sprouston, married Miss Jane Carmichael of Greenock. From all accounts, the results of this marriage were "all the happiness that the marriage relation can afford."<sup>4</sup> Their first two children were Twins, Jean and Helen, born in 1803. Two other children were born at Sprouston, Agnes and John. John was an accomplished musician and became Professor of Music in the University of Edinburgh in 1839. He married the daughter of Dr. John Lee, Principal of Edinburgh University, but died soon thereafter in 1841. Other children born of this marriage

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<sup>3</sup> The parish of Sprouston is situated in Roxburghshire in the border country of Scotland. The earliest mention made of this parish in any authentic document is found in the foundation charter of Selkirk, dated 1114. It is mentioned in the charter given to Kelso Abbey in 1128, as one of the parishes which was held in rectoria by the institution. Sprouston is also mentioned as one of the towns in a writ of protection granted by Henry VII to the monastery of Kelso. About the year 1540, the parish was the scene of a conflict between the Scots and the English in which the latter were defeated. Shortly following this encounter there was an incursion into Scotland by a large army led by the Duke of Norfolk which, marching up the Tweed, destroyed many towns and villages, including Sprouston. Statistical Account of Scotland (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1845), Vol. III, p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Watson, Memoir of the Rev. Andrew Thomson, D.D., The Edinburgh Christian Instructor, Vol. 1, p. 2.

were Janet, born at Perth, and Isabell, James, Andrew, and Christian Bonar, born in Edinburgh.<sup>5</sup>

Thomson was happy in his ministry at Sprouston and took a sincere interest in everything pertaining to the well-being of his parishioners. He regularly visited the homes of his people, either walking or on horse-back; and their needs, whether spiritual or physical, never escaped his notice and attention.<sup>6</sup>

While at Sprouston, Thomson "assiduously studied more minutely the history of the church, and the prerogative and development of the ecclesiastical courts."<sup>7</sup>

It was during his six years' ministry at Sprouston that he prepared himself for taking so large a share in the transactions of our ecclesiastical courts that placed him often in delicate positions, and occasionally produced a little unpleasantness, and somewhat of disappointment, amongst his friends and admirers; but the doctor always stood forward as the avowed adherent and uncompromising supporter of Presbyterian orders, and the purity of our Presbyterian worship.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Fasti-Ecclesiae Scoticae, Article on Thomson.

<sup>6</sup> In a letter from the Rev. William Craig to Miss Jean Watson it is recorded that there was a year of scarcity when meal was so costly that people could not pay for it, and Thomson "had the glebe sown over with oats, which he got round and sold to the parishioners at cost price." Watson, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> David Walker, The Border Pulpit (Edinburgh: David Walker, 1877), p. 143.

<sup>8</sup> Loc. cit.

None of the sermons which Thomson preached at this period in his ministry are extant but Walker says:

His sermons at Sprouston were impersonations of Christian life, delivered with a marked ability and eloquence; . . . his originality as well as his excellence were early noticed, and his friends were buoyant with hope and expectation that Andrew Thomson would very shortly become a leader in the Church of Scotland.<sup>9</sup>

One who knew him well records that during his ministry in his first parish:

He was zealously and faithfully discharging all the duties of the sacred office, among a people, who, though neither of refined nor polished manners, knew how to estimate the value of a gospel ministry, and were not less pleased than edified by the labours of their young, but able and affectionate pastor.<sup>10</sup>

The young minister was much interested in the education of his people and visited the parochial school regularly each week. There were two schools in his parish: the parochial and one "side-school" located at Lempitlaw, which is still in operation. Twice each year the older people of his parish were catechised, and for the benefit of the young among his parishioners, he wrote and published a catechism on the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>10</sup> David Dickson, A Sermon, Preached in St. George's Church, Edinburgh, on the 20th of February, 1831, Being the Sabbath after the Funeral of the Rev. Andrew Thomson, D.D., Minister of that Church, including a Sketch of His Life and Character (Edinburgh: George A. Douglas, 1831), p. 30.

Lord's Supper.<sup>11</sup> This work passed through many editions and had wide circulation and usefulness throughout Scotland.<sup>12</sup> In 1812, it was translated into Gaelic and distributed throughout the Highlands and the Islands.

This sacramental catechism contains 165 questions and answers and presents a discussion on the nature and observance of the Lord's Supper. It is good indication of Thomson's early and sincere interest in the religious education of the people, and affords an insight into his early convictions on some of the most important doctrines of the faith. "This little work," says one writer, "shows the author's mind to have been richly stored with that pure, and scriptural, and practical doctrine, which invariably . . . characterized his ministry."<sup>13</sup>

A brief examination of his early doctrinal position, as it is exhibited in this catechism, will prove helpful. He says he believes in the mission and doctrine of Christ because:

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Thomson, A Catechism for Instruction of Communicants in the Nature and Uses of the Sacrament of Our Lord's Supper. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, n.d.). This little catechism was the first of several helps which Thomson compiled for the benefit of the young in the church.

<sup>12</sup> Edinburgh Christian Instructor (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1810-1831), Vol. 30, p. 516. More than 60,000 copies of this catechism were sold by 1829.

<sup>13</sup> Loc. cit.

In Him were fulfilled a great variety of prophecies that were uttered some ages before he appeared; and by Him were wrought many miracles, or wonderful works, which 'no man could do except God were with him' . . . . I believe in the religion of Christ, because it is worthy of God to promulgate, and every way suitable to the nature and circumstances of man; because it contains the sublimest truths and the purest system of morality that were ever taught . . . because . . . it made such rapid and triumphant progress . . . which astounding success can be reasonably ascribed to nothing else than the power of God accompanying the labours of the apostles.<sup>14</sup>

Before a person can properly receive, or believe in, Christ, Thomson states, he must be made aware of the fact that he is guilty before God; that he cannot of himself merit God's pardon and favor; that he is undone forever unless some gracious and powerful Redeemer interpose on his behalf; and that he must be persuaded that Christ is such a Redeemer. He must also be convinced that Christ is willing and able to redeem; that he has been sent of God for that very purpose; and "that his mediation and atonement have been accepted of as perfect and satisfactory." If a person is to believe on Christ aright, it is "absolutely necessary" that he receive him just as he is offered in the Gospel, and not according to his own "private views and inclinations."<sup>15</sup>

In answer to his question: "What is faith considered as the instrument of our justification before God?" Thomson says:

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<sup>14</sup> Thomson, Catechism, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 15.



It is simply that principle of the heart by which we accept and trust in the righteousness of Christ. For the sake of this righteousness alone, God justifies us, that is, pardons all our sins and accepts of our persons; in order to which he is graciously pleased to impute it to us, or to place it to our account. And faith is . . . the hand or instrument with which we receive or hold the meritorious gift.<sup>16</sup>

This faith is "always a living and practical principle," and "wherever true faith exists, it fails not to purify the heart, to work by love and to overcome the world." A person has committed a "gross and fatal error" to think that he has saving faith, while he is not "careful to maintain good works." Faith is necessary for partaking worthily of the Lord's Supper, because if a person does not believe in Christ as a true messenger from God, "he cannot with any propriety do what is designed to keep him in grateful remembrance"; and if he has no trust in the merits of Christ's death, he cannot, "with any propriety, partake of the sacramental elements; for these represent a perfect sacrifice for sin which he offered up when he died on the cross." An individual must also confide in him as an "all-sufficient Savior," or he cannot reasonably expect to receive any blessing from his hand when he approaches Christ in this ordinance, and therefore his approach is in vain.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 16.



In this, his first parish, Thomson gave evidence of the strong and fiery elements of his character. It was said of him that:

When the alarm of invasion by the French was raised by fire beacons on the neighboring heights, he headed a numerous body of volunteers from the parish, and led them to Kelso, the appointed rendezvous for the district. This is more remarkable, as the parishioners were supposed to be much infected with French principles.<sup>18</sup>

It was not only in local affairs that his zeal for freedom and liberty and evangelical truth was displayed, but even in this early period of his ministry he took a great interest in all the activities of the General Assembly. He wrote a series of three long "letters," in pamphlet form, to Principal Hill of St. Andrew's, leader of the Moderate Party in the church, and one to Dr. John Inglis, another leader of the Moderates.<sup>19</sup> In these letters there is abundant evidence of his strong argumentative powers; his burning zeal in declaring his convictions, immature as they were; and his interest in all that concerned the welfare of the church. In examining these letters, however, it must be concluded that

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<sup>18</sup> Statistical Account of Scotland, loc. cit., Vol. III, p. 237.

<sup>19</sup> Writings of Dr. Andrew Thomson, Vol. 3.

In this series of "letters," Burns says, "he shook the cronstadt of moderatism to its center." Robert F. Burns, Life and Times of Rev. Robert Burns (Toronto: James Campbell and Son, 1871), p. 41.

too often he permitted his youthful enthusiasm and private ideas to get out of control.

The first of these letters was written when Thomson was only twenty-five years of age, and concern some of the proceedings of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1803. Thomson gives vent to his anti-moderate views and his concern for the purity of the church.

In his first letter to Principal Hill he attacks what he believes to be the careless way in which the Assembly conducted the examination of a Mr. McKenzie, who was being examined as a licenciate for the ministry.<sup>20</sup> He felt that the Assembly treated much too lightly certain accusations brought against McKenzie, and that the action of the Assembly was extremely bad for the influence of the Established Church. As the Assembly was dominated by the Moderate clergy, he placed the responsibility and the guilt on Principal Hill and the Moderate ministers. He employs some forty pages of fine print to prove that such action of the Assembly was very harmful to the purity of the church and was almost reason for the secession of sincere people who desired a pure church with a respected clergy. He tells Principal Hill that he is:

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<sup>20</sup> This case had been dealt with on Presbytery and Synod levels and was referred to the General Assembly.

. . . an obscure individual, living in a sequestered corner of the country, dependent on neither high nor low churchmen, ignorant in a great measure of those politics in which you are so versant, yet not unacquainted with the principles of law and common sense, and not unconcerned about the interests of that religious establishment with which Providence has favoured our land. I hate the dominion of a party in any court. I dislike an arbitrary mode of procedure even in a just cause . . . . I abhor every encroachment on the constitution of our church, or on the privileges of her members . . . . My heart and my reason are at enmity with such errors as these; and I shall ever be eager to expose them to the condemnation they deserve.<sup>21</sup>

He decries the manner in which the debates are conducted, and accuses the Assembly of failing to allow a member to be heard when "his integrity, his good name or even his abilities had been exposed to suspicion and misconstruction."<sup>22</sup> Throughout this letter Thomson's keen analytical faculty, his acute sharpness with his pen, and his powers of logic and argument are effectively exhibited. However, he also revealed an unfortunate lack of charity toward those with whom he disagreed. In the enthusiasm of youth he allowed himself to make many unguarded and unwise statements and accusations which, in later years, he would have considered inappropriate.

Referring to a speech by Principal Hill, Thomson said: "It was a blaze which dazzled without illuminating: a meteor

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Thomson, "A Letter to the Rev. Principal Hill," (Edinburgh: J. Pillans and Sons, 1803) [Writings of Thomson.]

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

of deceitful glare, which none but the ignorant or the prejudiced would accept as their guiding light."<sup>23</sup> He accuses Hill of listening too much to the "silent members" of the Moderate Party and of yielding too readily to "those who have the loaves and fishes at their disposal."<sup>24</sup>

In concluding his letter, Thomson says:

I have not words to express the abhorrence which I feel at the conduct of the last General Assembly. The decisions which it gave, considered in their nature and tendency, the manner in which they were supported and carried, and the principles by which the whole business seemed to be regulated, afford such striking symptoms of meanness and corruption, that it is impossible to say, whether the feelings of contempt or those of indignation, should predominate. Proceed as you have done for a few years longer, and, without pretending to the gift of inspiration, I venture to prophesy, that the Church of Scotland will be but the ruin of an Establishment, dilapidated by the hand of violence and folly, and possessing few vestiges of its former magnificence.<sup>25</sup>

This letter was dated July 22, 1803, and Thomson's prophecy was to be fulfilled in the Great Disruption just forty years later.

A second letter, containing some eighty-five pages, was written to Principal Hill concerning more of the proceedings of the Assembly of 1803.<sup>26</sup> This letter was written

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-40.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Thomson, "A Second Letter to the Rev. Principal Hill" (Edinburgh: Mundell and Son, 1805) [Writings of Thomson]

concerning the case of a Mr. John Stark, which had been referred to the General Assembly by Glasgow Presbytery.<sup>27</sup> Thomson attempted to show that the Assembly was persuaded to "throw away its character by giving solemn sanction to the adulterer and the bigamist."<sup>28</sup> The language of this letter is also severe, but the writer is convinced that if it is the vehicle of truth, its severity cannot be condemned. He again brings into play all his powers of logic, argument, and sarcasm, and condemns the Assembly for giving, what he feels, is wrong judgment.

Thomson's third letter to Principal Hill, and a subsequent letter to Dr. Inglis, dealt with the much publicized Leslie Case.<sup>29</sup> The chair of mathematics in the University of Edinburgh became vacant in 1805, because of the removal of Professor Playfair to the chair of Natural Philosophy. The final choice of a Professor to fill this chair lay before the patrons, the Town Council of Edinburgh, and this choice was between Mr. John Leslie and the Rev. Thomas McKnight. Leslie had demonstrated his ability by his work on the Nature and Propagation of Heat. McKnight was minister

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<sup>27</sup> Stark was seeking baptism of a child born out of wedlock.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Thomson, "A Third Letter to the Rev. Principal Hill" (Edinburgh: Mundell and Son, 1805) [Writings of Thomson.]

of Trinity College Church, Edinburgh, and had formerly served as assistant professor in the field of mathematics. Leslie was patronized by Professors Dugald Stewart, Playfair, and others who evidently had the sincere interests of the University at heart. McKnight was backed by the Moderate clergy, who had long encouraged pluralities, and "had set their hearts upon seeing their brother robed in the professorial gown."<sup>30</sup>

There was a growing opinion against the established practice which allowed the minister of a city church to be, at the same time, the occupant of a university chair. The Evangelicals were against it, "partly because of a lurking suspicion of all learning which was not overtly religious, partly because they believed that the work of a professor reduced the pastoral efficiency of a minister."<sup>31</sup> A party fight between the Evangelicals and the Moderates began to take shape and reached full proportions when it became known that the Town Council was about to appoint Leslie to the chair.

The Presbytery of Edinburgh, led by the Moderate clergy, addressed a remonstrance to the Senatus Academicus,

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<sup>30</sup> John Cunningham, The Church History of Scotland (Edinburgh: James Thin, Second Edition, 1882), p. 430.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew J. Campbell, Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland, 1707-1929 (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, Ltd., 1930), p. 161.



claiming that all professors must subscribe to the Confession of Faith and pointing that the academic patronage of the magistrates was to be exercised with the advice of their ministers (cum avisamento tamen eorum ministrorum).<sup>32</sup>

The Moderates claimed that Leslie was an infidel and unfit to serve as a professor in the University. Their claim was based on a note which Leslie had attached to his work on the Nature and Propagation of Heat, in which he said:

Mr. Hume is the first, as far as I know, who has treated of Causation in a truly philosophical manner. His Essay on Necessary Connection seems a model of clear and accurate reasoning.<sup>33</sup>

The ministers of Edinburgh repudiated the doctrine of causation as taught by Hume and which was adopted by Leslie, and thus the cry of atheism was raised. Regardless of the accusations hurled at Leslie, the Town Council--encouraged by the support of the Evangelicals--elected Leslie. The issue took on major proportions and went from the Presbytery to the Synod and from the Synod to the General Assembly.

Cunningham says that "the debate in the Assembly was the most brilliant that any man had listened to,"<sup>34</sup> and

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<sup>32</sup> Henry Cockburn, Memorials of His Time (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1856), p. 202.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>34</sup> Cunningham, op. cit., p. 432.



Henry Cockburn says that "some of the speeches, in this the most important Scotch debate I have ever known, were excellent."<sup>35</sup> The debate lasted two full days and when the vote was taken the election of Leslie was sustained, the Moderates defeated, and the Evangelicals had won a decisive battle.

Thomson's letter to Principal Hill on this subject consisted of 154 printed pages, supported Leslie for the chair, and accused the Moderates of "underhandedness and base motives."<sup>36</sup>

It is somewhat strange that the Evangelicals so wholeheartedly sided with Leslie, whom even the Moderates were accusing of heresy. This was, however, a party fight and the Evangelicals were anxious to see the Moderates defeated in this matter, even though it meant the placing of one in the University chair who had no Evangelical leanings.

Thomson presents to Principal Hill a thorough analysis of the case as he sees it, and accuses the ministers of Edinburgh, "in the name of moderate interests," of employing "the lowest means to accomplish their purpose."<sup>37</sup> His purpose

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<sup>35</sup> Cockburn, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Thomson, "A Third Letter to the Rev. Principal Hill" (Edinburgh: Mundell and Son, 1805) Vol. 2. [Writings of Thomson.]

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 2

in the letter is "to state in a public manner, the real merits of the question, and to expose the unjustifiable spirit of Mr. Leslie's opponents."<sup>38</sup>

Thomson's argument is logical and forceful, although expressed in language that is often harsh and bitter. A better demonstration of Thomson's ardent character and evangelical convictions is to be found nowhere in his early writings. These characteristics, however, were later to be modified with mature reason.

He attempted to prove that the accusations against Leslie were false and that his work contained no atheistical doctrine.<sup>39</sup> In his discussion he shows a remarkable knowledge of the history of the case and an acquaintance with the metaphysics involved.

His keen and analytical powers of mind were much in evidence and he applied his quick wit and biting sarcasm with unusual skill. He says:

I confess, I was a good deal amused, and not a little disgusted with the pompous and self-important style in which the ministers of Edinburgh spoke of themselves and their proceedings . . . they seemed to think that to them was entrusted the safety of religion; . . . that everyone who should dare to question the uprightness or the prudence of their conduct was necessarily a criminal . . . . Poor deluded men! Their share of respectability was

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

never great. The little they had is now lost. And their names . . . will descend to posterity with a mark upon them of indelible disgrace.<sup>40</sup>

Thomson expressed his "surprise" and "amazement" at the "high and uncommon zeal" which the Moderate ministers displayed in the interests of religion.

I had always looked upon these gentlemen as incapable of such feeling on such a subject . . . they abhor the idea of being connected with the missionary society . . . they would not for a thousand worlds be suspected of attending a prayer meeting, or patronizing Sunday Schools . . . no association of Christians for religious purposes has any allurements for them, unless it has been formed and sanctioned by the Royal Charter . . . I saw one clergyman, who had been so long unwell that he was unable to preach, speak against that gentleman (Mr. Leslie) with more animation than he ever employed to recommend the virtues of loyalty and patriotism; . . . I observed another, so cold and languid in his manner of confirming the great doctrines of the gospel from the pulpit, that his coldness and languor are proverbial, work himself into a kind of religious frenzy on Mr. Leslie's sixteenth note . . . This sudden transition from the icy regions of moderation, to the elevated and burning climes of enthusiasm, was . . . a sort of anomaly in human character; a circumstance unaccountable on human data.<sup>41</sup>

The final letter, or pamphlet, which Thomson wrote from Sprouston concerning the Leslie case, was written to Dr. John Ingles, one of the recognized leaders of the Moderate Party.<sup>42</sup> This letter concerned Ingles' examination of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-114.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 126-127.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Thomson, "A Letter to the Rev. Dr. Ingles" (Edinburgh: Mundell and Son, 1806), Vol. 2. [Writings of Thomson.]

Professor Stewart's "Short Statement of Facts" relative to the election of Mr. Leslie, and in 180 printed pages he uses that same sharp, biting language that characterized his letters to Principal Hill.

He assures Inglis, at the beginning of his letter, that he will "use no extraordinary degree of delicacy in exposing the falsehoods and absurdities, the sophisms and misrepresentations," with which his pamphlet abounds.<sup>43</sup> He blames Inglis for allowing the reference on Mr. Leslie's case to reach the Assembly, affirms that the case should have died even before it reached the Synod, and that:

Never was there a case . . . in which a body of men came forward with so little right to a favorable reception from the public; in which there was such an unceasing propensity to blunder; or in which a person would be more puzzled to say whether the errors of the head or those of the heart were more abundant.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout his letter Thomson shows a good knowledge of the history of civil affairs, as well as the history of the church. He draws from both to support his arguments which, on the whole, are clear and logical. Here again, his keen analytical powers of mind are employed to search every detail which might prove to be of some importance.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 67-91.

He presents a very helpful insight into his mind and reveals his early convictions in the discussion of the law which required professors to subscribe to the Confession of Faith.

. . . that professors should give the testimony of their allegiance to the state . . . that they should pledge themselves generally not to do what is prejudicial to the national church, appears to be reasonable and proper. But that they should likewise be obliged to subscribe to a creed, such as our Confession of Faith, is . . . throwing in their way a temptation, and a very powerful one, to prostitute conscience and to renounce the first principle of an honest man.<sup>46</sup>

In this same context he states his own convictions regarding Calvinism and the Confession of Faith and, for an ardent Evangelical, reveals a most charitable attitude towards science and its progress.

For my own part, I have subscribed to our Confession of Faith, because it is, without mental reservation, the confession of my faith; but although I am a Calvinist, I have not learned to be intolerant, to confound the interests of the gospel with those of any set of opinions, or to make the progress of science dependent on the conversion of scientific men to the creed which I have embraced. The longer I live, the more firmly I am attached to Calvinism; but I am likewise more firmly persuaded that Calvinism is not necessary, in any shape, to constitute a good and successful teacher of human science.<sup>47</sup>

After six years in the parish of Sprouston, Thomson was admitted as minister of the East Church in the parish of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

Perth on the 21st of March 1808.<sup>48</sup> At Perth a wider and more conspicuous sphere was opened for the exercise of his abilities, which "soon became more extensively known and more duly appreciated."<sup>49</sup>

His ministry at Perth, however, was relatively short--lasting only two years--and in the spring of 1810 he became minister of the New Greyfriars Church in the city of Edinburgh.<sup>50</sup>

When the New Greyfriars Church became vacant, on the removal of the Rev. Alexander Brunton to the Tron Church of Edinburgh, the patrons were much divided regarding the clergyman whom they should appoint to the charge. On the 22nd of November, 1809, the Convenor of the Edinburgh Town Council, the patrons, presented the following motion:

That the council resolve to present a petition . . . in favour of the Rev. Andrew Thomson, one of the ministers of Perth, to be minister of the said Church and parish

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<sup>48</sup> John Wilson, The Presbytery of Perth (Perth: C. Paton, 1860), pp. 222-225. It is interesting to note that both Andrew and his brother, William Aird Thomson, were admitted to the Presbytery of Perth on the same day--William to become minister of the Middle Church of Perth.

<sup>49</sup> Dickson, loc. cit.

<sup>50</sup> Only two of Thomson's discourses delivered in Perth are extant: Our Guilt, Our Danger and Our Duty as A People, which was preached on "National Fast Day" and a sermon preached on the 50th Anniversary of the reign of George III.

of New Greyfriars, as a person qualified in all respects to perform the duties of that charge.<sup>51</sup>

The Lord Provost and others protested against the election of Thomson on the grounds that he had been accused of being the "editor" of an anonymous "lybel" against the Chief Magistrate of the city.<sup>52</sup> A vigorous discussion followed on this and other matters involved, and the Convenor agreed to withdraw his motion until the following week.

At the next meeting of the Town Council Thomson's supporters rather conclusively answered his accusers, and asserted that the paragraph in question stated nothing disrespectful to the Lord Provost, and that Thomson "was not personally implicated in the publication, whomsoever it may be found to affect."<sup>53</sup>

The Convenor, in support of his motion in favor of Thomson, spoke of the high esteem in which he was held by the inhabitants of the City of Perth. To support his arguments he produced letters from the Duke of Athol and the Earl of Kinnoul, "a nobleman of high distinction."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Edinburgh Town Council Minutes of 22 Nov., 1809 (Unpublished records in the City Chambers, Edinburgh), Vol. 155, p. 69.

<sup>52</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 96 (Minutes of 29 Nov., 1809).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 98.



He believed that these letters counterbalanced all the "extravagant" protests that were made against Thomson. In speaking of them, he said:

They hold out the fairest prospects that not only the morals of the City of Edinburgh, but their loyalty and political principles (eminent as they already are) may yet receive some further polish from the ministry of Mr. Thomson.<sup>55</sup>

He then proceeded to read the letter from the Duke of Athol in which the writer stated:

It is with great pleasure that I give my testimony in favour of a most excellent discourse which I heard Mr. Andrew Thomson deliver at Perth on 25th of last month.<sup>56</sup> I considered that discourse as replete with good sense and sound judgment, and it marked Mr. Thomson to me as a gentleman possessed of very considerable abilities.<sup>57</sup>

The letter written by the Earl of Kinnoul from Dupplin Castle bears further testimony to Thomson's abilities: "I have always understood that gentleman to bear a character of the highest respectability, and of the most promising abilities."<sup>58</sup> He had heard Thomson preach and was "much pleased" with him, and reported that he gave the "greatest satisfaction to his hearers."

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Thomson, A Sermon preached on the 25th of October, 1809, Being the 50th Anniversary of His Majesty's Reign (Edinburgh: Alexander Smellie, 1809).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

I am of the opinion that Mr. Thomson is fully qualified for the distinguished honor of holding that situation for which he is now a candidate, and it will give me much pleasure to hear he is so fortunate as to obtain.<sup>59</sup>

The Convenor again moved that a presentation be granted to Mr. Thomson. But again the Lord Provost protested and proposed that another minister, Dr. Andrew Grant, should be presented to the New Greyfriars Church. When the votes were marked, eighteen members of the Council had voted for the presentation to be granted to Thomson and fourteen had voted in favor of Grant.<sup>60</sup>

The presentation was drawn up and presented to Thomson on the 6th of December, 1809. In his letter of acceptance he expressed his "deep sense of the honour" which had been conferred on him and said: "when inducted to the charge it shall be my endeavor to discharge the important duties of a minister of Edinburgh with diligence and fidelity."<sup>61</sup>

Thomson's removal to Edinburgh constituted a new era in his life; and in that cultured and discriminating city his talents and usefulness found their widest and most congenial field.

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<sup>59</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

His powerful ministrations here soon attracted attention. His character became established as one of the first preachers and most useful ministers in the city, and he was attended by a number of university students who were greatly benefited by his powerful and practical discourses.<sup>62</sup>

Another writer records that "many who have since distinguished themselves for Christian worth and attainments, owed their first religious impressions to his discourses in the New Greyfriars."<sup>63</sup>

He rose to such a high place in public esteem, and so strong and general had the impression in regard to his superior talents become, that within four years from the time of his appointment to New Greyfriars he was selected to become the first minister of St. George's Church and parish--one of the most important and challenging ministerial tasks in Edinburgh.

Hetherington, the church historian, says:

He was one of those men who stamp the impress of their own character upon that of the age in which they live; and his appearance in the Scottish metropolis must be marked as the commencement of an era in the ecclesiastical history of his country.<sup>64</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the cultural metropolis of Scotland was expanding in many directions.

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<sup>62</sup> Anderson, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>63</sup> Watson, Memoir, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> W. M. Hetherington, History of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1848), p. 369.

Charlotte Square was being built but was still incomplete, and there were very few buildings west of it to the banks of the water of Leith. Moray Place, Ainslie Place, and Randolph Crescent were only thickly wooded fields; and Heriot Row and Abercromby Place were just partially built. The cultured and professional people, who had lived in the Old Town, were moving to the modern and spacious homes that were being built in the western part of the New Town of Edinburgh.<sup>65</sup>

Regular attendance at a place of worship was, at this period, more-or-less regarded as the duty of every citizen--and it was obligatory on the Town Council to provide facilities. Until 1814, the needs of the people regarding a place of worship had been supplied by the erection of St. Andrew's Church, which was opened for worship in 1784. The need for another parish church had long been evidenced since some Presbyterians, unable to obtain sittings in St. Andrew's, were attending St. George's Episcopal Chapel in York Place.<sup>66</sup>

In July, 1810, the Lord Provost reported to the Town Council that "by an act of 1809 extending the Royalty of the

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<sup>65</sup> The Post-Office Annual Directory, from Whitsunday 1811, to Whitsunday 1812 (Edinburgh: Abernathy and Walker, 1811). This directory contains "an alphabetical account of the noblemen, private gentlemen, merchants, traders, and others in the city of Edinburgh with their residence."

<sup>66</sup> W. Forbes Gray, Historic Churches of Edinburgh (Edinburgh: The Moray Press, 1940), p. 122.

City over certain grounds to the north, the town of Edinburgh was required to build an additional church."<sup>67</sup> The civic authorities of Edinburgh were authorized by Parliament to build a church to accommodate the Presbyterian community as soon as there were five thousand inhabitants in the western part of the New Town of the city.<sup>68</sup> The motion was made that a committee be appointed "to meet with a committee from the Presbytery and to arrange a plan for raising part of the money to defray the expense of the erection, by granting leases for a term of years of the seats in the church upon the rents being paid in present money."<sup>69</sup>

The laying of the foundation-stone of the church took place on the 14th of May, 1811, and the records of the Town Council show periodic discussions of the problems which arose concerning the building of the church and of the expense involved.<sup>70</sup>

Robert Adam, the famous architect--who died in 1792--drew the plans for Charlotte Square and included a church,

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<sup>67</sup> Edinburgh Town Council Minutes (Unpublished records in the City Chambers, Edinburgh), Vol. 136, p. 187.

<sup>68</sup> The Scot's Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1814), Vol. 76, p. 116.

<sup>69</sup> Council Minutes, loc. cit.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Vol. 159, p. 164; Vol. 164, pp. 22-23, 223, 261-266.

modeled after St. Paul's Cathedral, which was to form the central feature of the west side.<sup>71</sup> His plans were not used, however, "partly because of expense and partly because the Adam style was gradually giving place to a craze for Grecian public buildings."<sup>72</sup> The plans that were adopted were drawn by the "King's Architect," Robert Reid, but the finished product occasioned some disappointment. The estimated cost of the church was eighteen thousand pounds but before it was completed it had cost over thirty-three thousand pounds.<sup>73</sup>

The church was not completed until 1814, but in December of the previous year the Town Council, patrons of the Edinburgh Churches, took up the question of appointing a minister to this new parish. The task of gathering and holding the influential people of the New Town of Edinburgh required a man of much ability. On the 29th of December, 1813, the Lord Provost, Sir James Majoribanks, informed the Town Council that the new church in Charlotte Square was nearly completed and, "considering the acknowledged ability of the Rev. Andrew Thomson, now minister of the New Greyfriars Church," moved that the council resolve to present Thomson

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<sup>71</sup> Gray, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>72</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>73</sup> Loc. cit.

to the new church and parish.<sup>74</sup> This motion was unanimously agreed to and the presentation was made to Thomson on the 9th of February, 1814.<sup>75</sup> This presentation was an excellent testimony to his popularity and abilities, and a strong indication that the Moderates were losing their hold on the Patrons, who had long favored the members of their party.

In his letter of acceptance, dated 14th February 1814, Thomson said:

I am well aware that were I for a moment to think of this as a personal favour, I should do great injustice to your Lordship and the other members of the Council who I am confident have been actuated in the whole of the arrangements by nothing but a regard to the religious interests of the community, yet I hope it may be allowed me to express the high gratification I receive from the favourable opinion of me which has thus been declared by such a respectable body of citizens.

I beg leave also to assure my honorable Patrons that it shall be my study, in dependence on that aid without which we can do nothing that is good, to discharge with diligence and fidelity the important duties to which they have been pleased to nominate me.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Council Minutes, Vol. 165, p. 171. It is interesting to note that on the same date the Council unanimously resolved to present Dr. John Thomson, Andrew's father, to the New Greyfriars Church, transferring him from the New North Church. This was the second time John Thomson was appointed to the New Greyfriars Church--the first occasion being in 1802. Thus he both preceded and succeeded his son in this Edinburgh Church.

<sup>75</sup> Council Minutes, op. cit., p. 227.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 263.





This presentation was sustained by the Presbytery of Edinburgh on 9th March 1814, after some discussion of the manner in which the new church was to be endowed.<sup>77</sup>

At a meeting of the Town Council on 19th January 1814, the bounds of the new parish were set and the church was officially named St. George's.<sup>78</sup>

The Town Council gave their authorization for the opening of St. George's Church to take place on the 5th of June 1814.<sup>79</sup> On that date Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, minister of St. Cuthberts, Edinburgh, preached the sermon from the text: "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil." (Eccles. v. 1).<sup>80</sup>

On the 16th of June, Thomson was inducted as minister of St. George's and the most public and brilliant part of his ministry commenced.

His new congregation formed rapidly and soon the church was filled with the most fashionable people of Edinburgh. One who was well acquainted with St. George's,

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<sup>77</sup> Scot's Magazine, op. cit., p. 314.

<sup>78</sup> Council Minutes, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>79</sup> Council Minutes, Vol. 166, p. 38.

<sup>80</sup> David MacLagan, St. George's Edinburgh (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1876), pp. 9-10.

called it a magnificent church:

Magnificent, not so much from its architectural embellishments, as from the rank, character, and education of the audience whom he gathered around him; it was here, at length, that he found a sphere of sufficient amplitude and interest, for the exercise of his transcendent powers; it was here, that he collected a congregation consisting almost entirely of the upper circles--of literary men, of eminent barristers, and other graduates of the college of justice; a congregation, of which it is no exaggeration to say, that it stands at this moment unique and unrivalled, in our church or in any church, for its intelligence and general habits of analysis.<sup>81</sup>

Among the wealthier classes in the city there existed a strong prejudice against evangelical preaching and he was regarded by many as "a vehement puritanical preacher."<sup>82</sup>

Thomas McCrie says that Thomson:

. . . entered to that charge with a deep sense of the importance of the station, as one of the largest and genteelst parishes of the metropolis, and not without the knowledge that there was in the minds of a part of those among whom he was called to labour, a prepossession against the peculiar doctrines which had always held a prominent place in his public ministrations.<sup>83</sup>

He soon overcame these prejudices and acquired a wide influence, though not through any "compromise of principle" or any "unworthy accommodation of divine truth to the prejudices of his audience."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> James Brown, A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Dr. Andrew Thomson (Berwick: Thomas Melrose, 1831), pp. 18-19.

<sup>82</sup> Anderson, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas McCrie, "Character of Dr. Thomson" (as found in E. C. I., Vol. 30, p. 136).

<sup>84</sup> Watson, Memoir, p. 7.

J. G. Lockhart, editor of the Quarterly Review, a biographer, and son-in-law of Sir Walter Scott, was "assured that church-going was a thing comparatively out of fashion among the fine folks of the New Town of Edinburgh," when Thomson was moved to St. George's. His appointment to the new church was met with "no inconsiderable coolness by the self-complacent gentry of his new parish."<sup>85</sup>

Though he adopted nothing that ordinary people would have supposed likely to overcome this coolness, he has already subdued all their prejudices, and enjoys at this moment (four years after his appointment to St. George's), a high degree of favour among all classes of his auditors, such as . . . very seldom falls to the share of such a man in such a place.<sup>86</sup>

It was at St. George's that Thomson reached full stature as a minister and churchman; and he soon made that pulpit "a central station of attraction from which the trumpet ran to rally the tribes for safety and defence."<sup>87</sup>

Thomas McCrie, one who knew him well, says of Thomson:

Simplicity--an essential element in all minds of superior mould--marked his appearance, his reasoning, his eloquence, and his whole conduct. All that he did was direct, straightforward, and unaffected; there was no labouring for effect, no paltering in a double sense. His talents were such as would have raised him to eminence in any profession or public walk of life which he might have chosen--a vigorous understanding, an active and ardent

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<sup>85</sup> J. G. Lockhart, "Clerical Portraits" (as found in the Scot's Magazine, Vol. 84, for 1819--Part II, pp. 114-116).

<sup>86</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>87</sup> Daily Review -- October 21, 1831, p. 200.

mind, with powers of close and persevering application. He made himself master in a short time of any subject to which he found it necessary to direct his attention, had all his knowledge at perfect command, expressed himself with the utmost perspicuity, ease and energy, and when roused by the greatness of his subject, or by the nature of the opposition which he encountered, his bold and masterly eloquence produced an effect, especially in a popular assembly, far beyond that which depends on the sallies of imagination or the dazzling brilliancy of fancy-work.<sup>88</sup>

By the year 1818, four years after he became minister of St. George's, Thomson's reputation as a minister and churchman had not only spread over Scotland but had reached America as well. Columbia College of New York offered to confer upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity. He refused to accept this offer, however, but in November, 1823, accepted the Doctor of Divinity degree from Marischal College of the University of Aberdeen.<sup>89</sup>

Thomson formed lasting friendships among the most eminent clergymen of the Established Church of Scotland but one of his closest friends was Dr. Thomas McCrie, the biographer of Knox and Melville, one of the most prominent ministers of the Secession church. In the Life of Dr. McCrie, by his son, the author tells of his father's friendship with Thomson, and says:

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<sup>88</sup> McCrie, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>89</sup> Fasti-Ecclesiae Scoticae, (Article on Thomson).

Dr. Thomson's visits were short but frequent, and in the hilarity and fascinating humour of his conversation, our author found an agreeable relaxation from his severer studies: the hearty laugh proceeding from 'the study' was the well-known indication to the whole household that he was closeted with Dr. Andrew Thomson.<sup>90</sup>

In his brief sketch of the life of Thomson, McCrie, the elder, says:

In private life Dr. Thomson was everything that is amiable and engaging. He was mild and gentle and cheerful;--deeply tender and acutely sensitive in his strongest affections; most faithful and true in his attachments of friendship--kindhearted and indulgent to all with whom he had intercourse.<sup>91</sup>

Thomas Chalmers, another of Thomson's close friends, had great admiration for him and avowed in a funeral sermon that:

. . . he was at all times a joyous, hearty, gallant, honorable, and out and out most trustworthy friend. . . . by far the most declared and discernable feature of his character, was a dauntless, and direct, and right forward honesty, that needed no disguise for itself, and was impatient of aughtlike dissimulation or disguise in other men.<sup>92</sup>

Chalmers further says:

There was withal a heart and a hilarity in his companionship, that everywhere carried its own welcome along with it; and there were none who moved with greater or

<sup>90</sup> Thomas McCrie, Life of Thomas McCrie (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1892), p. 211.

<sup>91</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 30, p. 138.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Chalmers, A Sermon Preached . . . on the Occasion of the Death of the Rev. Dr. Andrew Thomson (Glasgow: William Collins, 1831), p. 27.

wielded a greater ascendant over so wide a circle of living society.<sup>93</sup>

· · · It is just as if death had wanted to make the highest demonstration of his sovereignty, and for this purpose had selected for his mark, him who stood the foremost, and most conspicuous in the view of his countrymen.<sup>94</sup>

He labored so faithfully and zealously as a minister of the Church of Scotland that when he died Chalmers could say that he had become "the personal acquaintance of the people of Scotland. Insomuch, that there is not a village in the land, where the tidings of his death have not conveyed the intimation that a master in Israel has fallen."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

PART II

ANDREW THOMSON -- MATURITY AND SERVICE



## CHAPTER I

### THE MINISTER

#### A. THE MINISTER OF THE WORD (DEI VERBI MINISTER)

When Thomson came to Edinburgh it was fashionable to be on "friendly terms with skepticism, and to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ."<sup>1</sup> The ascendancy of Moderatism in the church had begun to give way but its effects were widely spread and deeply rooted, and the general atmosphere was cold and indifferent. Thomas Chalmers presents this picture of the preaching of the day:

This was the middle age of the Church of Scotland, an age of cold and feeble rationality, when Evangelism was derided as fanatical, and its very phraseology was deemed an ignoble and vulgar thing, in the upper classes of society. A morality without godliness--a certain prettiness of sentiment, served up in tasteful and well-turned periods of composition--the ethics of Philosophy, or the academic chair, rather than the ethics of the Gospel--the speculations of Natural Theology, and perhaps an ingenious and scholar-like exposition of the credentials, rather than a faithful exposition of the contents of the New Testament,--these for a time dispossessed the topics of other days, and occupied that room in our pulpits, which had formerly been given to the demonstrations of sin, and of the Savior.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Buchanan, The Ten Year's Conflict (Edinburgh: Blackie and Son, New Edition, 1863), Vol. 1, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Chalmers, A Sermon Preached . . . On the Occasion of the Death of the Rev. Dr. Andrew Thomson (Glasgow: William Collins, 1831), pp. 14-15.

Thomson brought to his pulpits in Edinburgh a powerful mind and a heart overflowing with warmth of devotion for the evangelical cause of the church. It is to his credit that he brought back culture to the pulpit without in the least degree obscuring the cross.<sup>3</sup> His preaching was forceful and direct, not only with a style of its own, but with special attention to the times and circumstances.

He believed that moderatism, with its lay patronage and worldly sympathies, had done untold evil in Scotland, and he burned with the desire to bring the pulpit and the people of his country once more under that Gospel which was the power of God unto salvation.<sup>4</sup>

He had a high conception of the office of the Christian minister. He believed that the minister, along with the moral philosopher, may be considered as having for his object the intellectual and moral improvement of man; but this by no means constituted the chief end of pastoral ministrations.

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Mackinnon, Some Chapters in Scottish Church History (Edinburgh: R. W. Hunter, 1893), p. 150.

Mackinnon makes this interesting comparison: "It was my privilege some years ago to worship one Sabbath in Trinity Church, Boston, of which . . . Philips Brooks was incumbent . . . Boston is the home of American literati, and . . . Skepticism has had a strong hold there . . . Rationalism was fashionable; but in no other pulpit throughout the city, could the same commanding intellect and spiritual fervour be found, as Philips Brooks brought to bear on the preaching of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior of men. He popularized Evangelical religion there . . . My own reflection in retiring from it was--this is just like what Andrew Thomson did for Evangelical Religion in Edinburgh, seventy years ago."

<sup>4</sup> W. G. Blaikie, The Preachers of Scotland (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1888), p. 272.

. . . the Christian priesthood bears on it the seal of immortality. It has to do with man as heir of eternity. Its object in this connection is to rescue him from the bondage of spiritual ignorance and sin; to enlarge his acquaintance with the Divine character and will; to invite him to the love and the pursuit of what is pure and excellent; and to train him, through a course of holy obedience, for the felicity of heaven. It aims to save men; and, for this end, it directs them to the Savior, who died for them, and to the Sanctifier, who, by his holy energy, fits them for heaven . . . it is associated with all that is sublime and holy in the character of God; with all that is interesting and important in the character of man; and with all that is grand in his ultimate destination.<sup>5</sup>

Thomson, with this high conception of the office of the Christian minister, gave to his calling all the energies he possessed. He esteemed it his highest honor to be employed in proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation to perishing sinners and in "testifying to all the Gospel of His grace." He was never weak or careless in his efforts but, conscious that he was dealing with matters of eternity, was earnest, zealous, and persevering. He contemplated the high office to which he had been called and then asked the following questions:

Can he be cold or heartless in his addresses from the pulpit, who considers himself appointed to promote the deliverance of men from the greatest of evils, and their exaltation to happiness and glory everlasting? Can he be desultory or feeble in his exertions, who views his exertions in immediate relation to all that is majestic in truth and grand in eternity?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Thomson, editor, The Edinburgh Christian Instructor (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1810-1831), Vol. 11, p. 97. [Hereinafter known as the E. C. I.]

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

The habitual recollection of the great object of his ministrations inspired him with zeal and gave a character of seriousness, solemnity, and power to his pulpit admonitions.

He says:

The reason a minister becomes cold and frigid in his habits and manners, is to be found principally in this: that he allows his mind to dwell habitually on secular things, and terminates his views and his aims in the oblivion of the tomb.<sup>7</sup>

He was convinced that as a Christian minister it was his duty to know his Bible and:

To preach the truth as revealed in Scriptures; to unfold the system of gracious interposition, so far as the light of revelation allows; to exhibit the promises and privileges of grace in all their benevolent and attractive colors; and to press them on to the acceptance of men by all the arguments which reason, and conscience, and scripture suggest.<sup>8</sup>

Early in his ministry in Edinburgh, he said:

We have little reason to boast that the pure truths of the gospel are faithfully recorded in our national creeds and confessions, if they are allowed to remain there in retentis: nor can we see what fruit they can possibly produce, if they are never illustrated and applied by the ministers of religion, for the conversion and edification of their people.<sup>9</sup>

He addressed men, "not as saints, but as sinners; rebels against the government of heaven; alienated from the love and practice of holiness."<sup>10</sup> Every sermon, according

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<sup>7</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 2, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 11, p. 99.

to Thomson, should sound the evangelistic note and the gospel should be presented to all men with great earnestness. He believed that man's natural inability to respond should not prevent the making of the offer with all possible power and appeal.

The preacher is bound on all occasions to remember that the persons whom he addresses are sinners, and that the subject on which he addresses them . . . is nothing less than the plan devised by infinite mercy and wisdom to deliver them from the power and punishment of sin, to sanctify them in time, and glorify them through eternity. . . . he ought on no occasion to forget, that whatsoever be the topic of his discourse, it constitutes a branch of the same high subject, and that the design of all preaching is to convert sinners from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, to confirm and animate the perseverance of the saints, and to lead men to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world.<sup>11</sup>

Thomson's sermons present most clearly his great heart yearning for the souls of men and one can almost visualize his outstretched hand, offering the gospel of Christ, so fully and freely, to all who would accept it.

The whole energies of his deep and vehement nature were thrown into his sermons, both because he was profoundly concerned for the welfare of each member of his congregation, and because he regarded the predominance of Evangelicalism as the very salvation of both his church and his country.<sup>12</sup>

Thomson felt that the ordinary style of preaching in Scotland was not well calculated to revive religion or to excite any particular interest in its favor.

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<sup>11</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 17, p. 401.

<sup>12</sup> Blaikie, op. cit., pp. 272-273.



Too often an effort is made to shine rather than to edify; to please the mind with the exhibition of an intellectual feast rather than to effect the heart by a plain and scriptural delineation of evangelical truth. The plan of abstract discussion rather than of direct address has, we fear, been carried to excess; and the method has been too extensively adopted of treating men as creatures purely rational, and the subjects of exclusively mental conviction.<sup>13</sup>

There was a want of simple and luminous arrangement in the discourses that were preached, and he lamented the sad lack of "scriptural statement and of truly Christian illustration."

Of what avail are cold and barren generalities? Or the essays of a Seneca or an Epictetus? Or the tame and pointless lucubrations which 'fall soporific on the listless ear'? Is such a style of preaching calculated to awaken thoughtless men to the grand concerns of eternity? To arrest the consciences of sinners? To fix the wandering mind, or to direct the trembling victim of despondence to the promises of the gospel?<sup>14</sup>

He surveyed the state of the Established Church, torn by dissent and making little impression on the lives of the people, and wrote:

Till the doctrine of the cross become the glory, not of the standards only, but of the teachers of the church, the walls may remain, but the house will be desolate; dissenters will multiply, in opposition to every restraint which may be imposed or contemplated; and its avowed guardians may have to lament, when it will be too late, the destruction of a fabric which, but for their own misguided policy, might have been raised to more than its original splendour, and have given

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<sup>13</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 28, p. 653.

<sup>14</sup> Loc. cit.

protection and nourishment to the children of Zion, throughout the land.<sup>15</sup>

Thomson believed that to "preach the Gospel" was not merely to state its evidences and assert its paramount authority. Preaching to him was not merely explaining and enforcing gospel precepts and neither was it simply noticing, as the occasion required, its leading principles as abstract and speculative truths. He felt that a minister may do all this and yet fail to preach the truth as it is in Christ. To him, to "preach the Gospel," was to exhibit it to the view of men, in its definite and characteristic features, as a gracious remedy for the moral diseases of human nature. It was to be presented as a scheme devised and executed by infinite wisdom and love, for rescuing men from the guilt and power of sin by the atoning righteousness of the Savior through the gracious efficacy of His Spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Give me the Gospel and let me go forth with it as it is found in the pure, and quick, and powerful word of God: and with this one engine, independently of every other, I will undertake to renovate, and reform, and sanctify the world, as far as that attainment can be reached. And when you bring forward other instruments for effectuating that object, I say that, on the one hand, unless they are authorized by revelation, or conformable to it, little or no benefit can be expected from them, and that, on the other, if they have its

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<sup>15</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 7, p. 178.

<sup>16</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 10, p. 33.



sanction, it not only imposes . . . the obligation of using them, but in so far as it is permitted to direct them, and to commingle with them, and rule over them, they will be found effectual for accomplishing their purpose of making men wiser and better as subjects of Almighty God.<sup>17</sup>

He was convinced that the only hope of bringing men to the obedience of Christ lay in presenting to them, faithfully and broadly, the doctrine of the Cross of Christ.<sup>18</sup> In order to render Christianity efficient as an instrument of sanctification, it must be presented to men "principally as it is characterized by the doctrine of the cross--as it is a system of divine grace--as it is a message of reconciliation."<sup>19</sup>

One who sat under Thomson's ministry for a "considerable time," asserted:

The chief object of his discourses, generally speaking, was to exalt the righteousness and work of Christ, as the only scriptural ground of the sinners justification and hope. To the indispensable necessity of faith in the blood of atonement he gave a marked and merited prominence in all his pulpit productions . . . .<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew Thomson, Sermons on Various Subjects (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., Second Edition, 1830), p. 69.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 460.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>20</sup> James Brown, A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Dr. Thomson (Berwick: Thomas Melrose, 1831), p. 24.

According to Thomson, to "preach the Gospel," was to declare frequently and seriously the guilt and demerit of all men as transgressors of God's law. It was to show the innate depravity of the human heart; its opposition to infinite holiness; the inability of man to change his moral propensities or principles; and the consequent necessity of divine grace to enlighten the mind and to sanctify the heart. He said that it . . . was the duty of the Christian minister "to labour to remove those prejudices against the truth of God, and those false notions respecting religion, which all men naturally entertain; and to instill into their minds the pure, uncorrupted doctrine of the sacred Scriptures."<sup>21</sup>

To be faithful as a Christian minister was to assert zealously and habitually the doctrine of gratuitous salvation by the cross of Jesus and, at the same time, the necessity of vital practical godliness which flows from the influence of this doctrine. He sincerely believed that a man could not be said to preach the gospel, if in his system of instruction, Christ, and Salvation by Him, did not hold first place--at once the basis of hope, and as the spring of practical holiness.<sup>22</sup>

Every man who 'serves at the altar,' professes to be an ambassador of Christ, and in this character, is

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<sup>21</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 3, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Thomson, Sermons on Various Subjects, op. cit., p. 460.

required, like Paul, in Christ's stead, to beseech men that they be reconciled to God. This indeed is the great object of the Christian ministry, and unless he assiduously and constantly labours to promote it, he can deserve no more dignified a title than that of a hireling or impostor.<sup>23</sup>

He preached that the salvation revealed in the gospel is wholly of grace through faith, and not of works; that the justification of the sinner is founded, not upon his own personal righteousness, either in whole or in part, but upon the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant. He was equally zealous, moreover, in maintaining and in teaching, that sanctification is as necessary to our final happiness as justification, and that without holiness, "no man shall see the Lord." He believed that purity and holiness formed the very essence of happiness and that it was vain to expect the comforts of true religion here, or the blessedness of heaven hereafter, unless the individual became conformed to the divine image, and lived in obedience to the divine precepts.<sup>24</sup>

. . . while great blessings are held out to us to receive, a great work is at the same time given us to do--that the richest and freest benefits are associated with the utmost diligence in duty, and the rigid abstinence from sin--that doctrinal truth and practical Godliness, that peace and purity, that God's love to us and our love to him, are constantly and inseparably united--that we must at once know, and believe, and accept, and feel,

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<sup>23</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 7, p. 180.

<sup>24</sup> Thomson, op. cit., p. 416.

and do, as our Father in Heaven has been pleased to communicate his mercies, and his promises, and his will in order that we may be the true Israel . . . .<sup>25</sup>

Though the emphasis of Thomson's preaching is largely biblical and theological, he said:

We do not think it necessary that every discourse should be expressly on one or the other of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel . . . but the discourses which either do not plainly unfold them, or do not recognize their authority . . . must, in our opinion, be regarded as unfaithful and injurious. They are unfaithful, because they do not give a fair representation of Christianity in that feature by which it is principally distinguished as a plan of salvation. And they are injurious, because they shut up from those who hear or peruse them those truths which are most suitable to their spiritual condition; and tend to make them satisfied with a most imperfect system both of doctrine and of duty. We can dispense with genius, and with science, and with erudition, and with elegance in sermons; but we cannot, on any account, dispense with what God has revealed to men for their justification and redemption as perishing sinners. From the minister of Christ we must have the good news which his Master has given him to bring, and which essentially belong to our everlasting peace.<sup>26</sup>

From an examination of Thomson's sermons, it is evident that his was a systematic theology, but his system embraced practice as well as principle. To his mind, the one was so intimately connected and so thoroughly interwoven with the other, that he never gave them a detached and separate state. He attempted to inculcate sound doctrine, and esteemed it a most important part of ministerial teaching,

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Thomson, The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted in Series of Sermons (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1830), pp. 353-354.

<sup>26</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 16-17, p. 107.

but he never rested in speculative statement. His object was to produce obedience and submission to the truth. The theme on which he delighted to dwell was the riches of divine grace as manifested in the sufferings and death of the Redeemer. He did not content himself with announcing and expounding this subject, but he was anxious that it should lay hold of the affections of the heart and influence the whole conduct. He, accordingly, never lost an opportunity of impressing on his hearers the necessity of repentance from dead works, and of their peculiar obligations to a life of godliness and virtue.<sup>27</sup> He believed that:

In the professing Christian, nothing can be more absurd than that he should be diligent in adding to his stores of religious information, and not in maintaining an appropriate conduct, when the very source from which his information is derived tells him distinctly that it is worse than useless if it is not obtained and employed for the purpose of advancing in the ways of piety and holiness.<sup>28</sup>

Thomson represented good works as the fruit of the Holy Spirit, as the evidences of a true faith, as a qualification for the kingdom of heaven, and as good and profitable to men. He insisted that they must originate in Christian principles and Christian motives in order that they might serve their proper ends. He never failed to speak of them

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<sup>27</sup> Thomson, Sermons on Various Subjects, op. cit., pp. 22-75.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Thomson, Sermons on Hearing the Word Preached (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1825), pp. 132-133.

as the peculiar, as well as the indispensable accompaniments of a saving knowledge of the doctrines of the cross. He believed that this was the only true way of preaching righteousness, and that the discourses which, instead of adopting it, merely threw out random exhortations to good conduct, were either altogether ineffectual, or encouraged a very imperfect type of morality.

It is of great importance to remember the necessity of uniformly inculcating the inseparable connection between the doctrine and the morality of the gospel, by pointing out the particular practical influence which every separate article of faith, whenever it is truly believed, must have on the conduct.<sup>29</sup>

Professor G. D. Henderson calls attention to Thomson's sermons in order to emphasize this aspect of Scottish preaching in the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century.

Scottish sermons often dealt with sanctification, attempting a serious application of texts to practical life, avoiding what they call 'mere morality,' but making much of obligations of the Christian in the face of all duties, circumstances and relationships. As one example, sermons of Dr. Andrew Thomson of St. George's, Edinburgh, (1831), may be mentioned. Good works are the fruit of the Spirit. The worshipping function of the church is achieved when its members are renewed in the image of God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness.<sup>30</sup>

Thomson was careful in the preparation of his sermons and attempted to construct them and present them in such a manner that they should be comprehended by all his hearers.

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<sup>29</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 1, p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> G. D. Henderson, Church and Ministry (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), p. 51.



He believed that for a minister to entertain a low idea of the capacities of the common people for acquiring religious information, or even for reasoning on religious subjects, betrayed ignorance of their character and tended to encourage clerical indolence in preparing suitable instruction for them. The people might not be as learned as their teacher, nor understand so well the connections of a logical argument, but if they read their Bibles, and were at all accustomed to reflection, they were sufficiently capable of following his reasonings, and discovering the light which he was able to throw on the more difficult passages of the sacred volume.<sup>31</sup>

He believed that:

Philosophical disquisitions, clothed in a metaphysical dress of frequent criticisms on the sacred text, are certainly not to be commended as suitable to the pulpit; but the aids, both of philosophy and of criticism, as far as they tend to illustrate or confirm the great articles of natural and revealed religion, may be employed in such a way as at once to communicate the most important information to the people, and to be the means of strengthening their faith in every essential point connected with Christian godliness.<sup>32</sup>

He was anxious to promote the good of his people, and did not seek to amuse them by gratifying the imagination, or by yielding to the insatiable desire of novelty. The sermons of Christian ministers, he believed, ought not to be "mere

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<sup>31</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 1, p. 111.

<sup>32</sup> Loc. cit.



abstract discussions of the truths of Christianity, serving no other purpose than to display the argumentative or rhetorical powers of the preachers . . . ."33 The Christian minister was "to declare the whole counsel of God," with a view to the ends for which it was designed: the conversion and edification of the souls of men.

He aspired to the honor of being an instrument in the hand of God for "converting a sinner from the error of his way," and for "turning many to righteousness," and did not hesitate to attack the prevailing sins of the time.

When a minister is anxious about tropes, and figures, and similes, while he leaves out of view the awful realities of eternity, and is terrified to attack boldly this and the other sin, lest, in so doing, he should touch the conscience of some dignified or titled sinner; we see in all this something so unfaithful, so pitifully mean, and so utterly disgusting, that we have not words adequately to express our abhorrence of it.<sup>34</sup>

W. M. Taylor presents a very helpful insight into Thomson's preaching and convictions when he says:

The Gospel was always in the central and highest place in his discourses, but he clothed it in attractive forms, as was as eminent for the beauty of his compositions as any of the best writers of his day . . . . It had come to be the belief of a large part of the community that to be an Evangelical was a mark of intellectual weakness and literary uncouthness; but in Thomson they beheld one who in both of these respects was equal, if not superior, to the ablest lawyer or author in the land

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<sup>33</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 3, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 13, p. 325.

and they were in a manner compelled to respect the position which he took.<sup>35</sup>

In reading Thomson's sermons, one is never allowed to forget that he is a Christian teacher; and that to preach Christ and Him Crucified, as the sum of Christian truth, the foundation of Christian duty, and the source of Christian comfort, is the object which he feels it is both his duty and his constant delight to accomplish. He appears to be always in earnest, as one speaking on subjects in which the everlasting interests of mankind are inseparably involved.<sup>36</sup>

His sermons were characterized by the frequent adoption and skillful application of scriptural language. Speaking of the use of scripture in the pulpit, he says:

The language of scripture is dignified and impressive: it carries a weight with it, which no other possesses. It reaches the heart and touches the conscience . . . . We justly deprecate . . . the too general practice of neglecting the use of the inspired language . . . . If the language of scripture is to be banished from our pulpit addresses, we need not wonder if the reverence in which the scriptures are held should gradually diminish . . . .<sup>37</sup>

"A preacher of the word," he says, "ought to take his subjects (not his texts merely) from the Bible and his illustrations where he can find them."<sup>38</sup> He was wise in his

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<sup>35</sup> W. M. Taylor, The Scottish Pulpit from the Reformation to the Present Day (London: Charles Burnet and Co., 1887), p. 168.

<sup>36</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 13, p. 400.

<sup>37</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 4-5, p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 3, p. 41.

use of scripture and applied it fearlessly, though he said "it is unfashionable to quote scripture frequently. Philosophers and fine ladies dislike to have their favorite opinions and darling vices assailed and knocked to pieces by texts of scripture."<sup>39</sup>

He was very conscious of the fact that the language of scripture could be misapplied and the liberty of using it abused. The disuse of the sacred language was a strong indication of the neglect into which the study of the scriptures had fallen, even among the clergy of the church. "In truth," he said, "he who would preach usefully, must with true simplicity follow the Bible, in endeavoring to produce conviction on the minds of sinners, and to edify believers."<sup>40</sup>

We must preach the gospel as it is found in the inspired record--'the faith as it was once delivered to the saints'--'the whole counsel of God' as it is revealed by Christ and his prophets and apostles. Were we to do otherwise we should be unfaithful to the trust committed to us; we should be 'handling the word of God deceitfully,' and contributing, not to guide and to save, but to delude and to ruin the people who wait on our ministry.<sup>41</sup>

Thomson appeared to have imitated the great apostle to the Gentiles in addressing the hearts and consciences of

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<sup>39</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>40</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 20, p. 747.

<sup>41</sup> Thomson, Sermons on Hearing the Word Preached, op. cit., p. 68.

men. He did not deal in cold harangues which glide over the surface of the mind and leave no impression of their existence.

. . . in the clear fountain of his thoughts, there were no turbid elements -- no confusion of ideas -- no obscure images -- no surface on which a wayward fancy could paint the fluctuating figures of its own extravagance -- so in his discourses, all was simple, perspicuous, unaffected, and intelligible.<sup>42</sup>

Thomson's sermons were, with few exceptions, closely textual, with every portion of the text being carefully analyzed. In his review of a sermon in the Christian Instructor, he said:

. . . the style of preaching, of which the sermon under our consideration is a specimen, is called textual, and it is the style of preaching to which we give our unqualified approbation. Not only is it more useful in itself, but more easily understood by an unlearned audience.<sup>43</sup>

In his sermons the propositions of the text which he was to discuss and establish were shown to arise naturally out of it. In the elucidation of his topics, he was frequently argumentative, yet practical; and his reasoning, though close and logical, was distinguished by such clearness and simplicity that little effort was required to follow him. The great object of his discourses was to enlighten and convince and make men better, and he almost uniformly closed

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<sup>42</sup> Watson, Memoir, pp. 7-8.

<sup>43</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 20, p. 747.

with a practical application of his subject to the hearts and consciences of his hearers.

The themes of his pulpit addresses were many and varied, yet Christianity appeared in them all as the religion for sinners; and the great aim of the preacher was to invite sinners to Christ, once crucified but now exalted, as "the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation."<sup>44</sup>

Thomson was fond of preaching on specific themes. He said:

Barren generalities are of little avail either in religion or in common life. A minister may preach for years on general topics, without exciting any feeling of interest, or making any impression on the understanding and the heart. It is by descending to particulars--by going into the minutiae of things--splitting the system of truth and of duty into its component parts--applying it to the cases of individual character, and the circumstances of human life--entering into the lesser concerns of human society and individual interests,--it is by such means as these, that sermons, and moral addresses from the press, are found to make the deepest and most lasting impression.<sup>45</sup>

It was his stated desire to "awaken the consideration of the thoughtless, to unmask the various delusions of hypocrisy, to persuade men to be reconciled to God, and to edify the body of Christ by a suitable mixture of encouragement and admonition . . . ."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Thomson, op. cit., pp. 1-524.

<sup>45</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 15, p. 196.

<sup>46</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 1, p. 112.

Thomson was not in the habit of writing out his discourses before coming to Edinburgh, as he possessed "great natural fluency . . . of thought and of expression," but on his appointment to St. George's, he became aware of the importance of correctness and variety in his compositions addressed chiefly to the higher classes of society in the city. For almost twenty years, therefore, he weekly composed and wrote two discourses for the pulpit and most of them were long, logical, and almost completely devoid of illustration--except that which was drawn from scripture.<sup>47</sup>

He was careful to arrange the parts of his discourses in such lucid order that every particular should not only stand forth in its own manifest individual truth and dignity, but so as to add grace and strength to those that preceded and those that followed. The heads, which were not generally numerous, were such as to embrace his whole subject and always fitted logically into place.

The words and sentences which he chose, seemed to harmonize with the great object of inducing men to acknowledge and receive the truths inculcated. He carefully avoided long and involved sentences which naturally occasion more-or-less obscurity, but employed the individual words that were most simple and most appropriate.

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<sup>47</sup> Watson, Memoir, p. 7. (112 of Thomson's published sermons are extant.)



A representative volume of his sermons contain some twenty-two discourses, all of which are of considerable length.<sup>48</sup> An examination of the topics of these sermons presents a general picture of his emphasis in preaching.

The title of the first sermon in the volume is Salvation by Grace. The subject of the next one is Human and Divine Love Contrasted. Then an Exhortation After Communion is followed by sermons entitled: On the Joyful Sound, Spiritual Renovation, The Testimony of Conscience, and The Christian's Choice. The next sermon is entitled Christian Beneficence and is followed by five discourses from 1 Timothy vi:1, of which the following are the titles: The Imperfections of Christians Exaggerated, The Imperfections of Christians No Argument Against Christianity (this is the subject of two discourses), The Duty of Christians in Reference to the Objection Founded on Their Imperfections, (this is also the subject of two sermons).

Other sermons in the volume are entitled: Encouragement to Prayer, Exhortation After Communion, Prayer in Affliction, and The Penitent's Prayer. There is then a third and last Exhortation After Communion, which is followed by sermons on the following subjects: Spiritual Disease and its Remedy, Christian Resignation, The Accepted Time,

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<sup>48</sup> Andrew Thomson, D.D., Sermons and Sacramental Exhortations (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1831).



Views of Death, and Christian Perseverance. The last sermon in the volume is an appropriate conclusion for the whole and is entitled: The Christian Minister's Farewell.

A study of the contents shows that the leading and fundamental truths of the gospel are presented in this one volume of Thomson's sermons. Most of the essential doctrines are exhibited again and again with renewed interest and attraction, as in the sermons on Salvation by Free Grace, Spiritual Disease and its Remedy, and Spiritual Renovation. In these and other discourses, the great truths of Divine Revelation are set forth in clear, copious, and impressive manner, with a distinct bearing on their practical influence on the heart and life. There are many, however, particularly those on The Imperfections of Christians, which in the complete and satisfactory manner sweep away the sophistry and cavils of infidel objectors to the character and tendency of the gospel, while in the most powerful manner they bind believers to a life of holy and vigilant circumspection.

It is not necessary to examine each of these discourses but it will prove helpful in evaluating Thomson's preaching to note the manner in which one or two of them was presented. The first sermon in the volume which is being considered, Salvation by Grace, will serve for this analysis.

The introduction is clear, interesting, and scriptural, and bears closely upon the subject. It prepares the mind for that which is to follow, and seeks to remove the prejudices with which human corruption is ready to arm itself against the doctrine of salvation by free grace. The author says:

. . . it will be found to commend itself at once to our judgment, our belief, and our submission, if we will only consent to take our views from that sacred volume, which alone assures us that there is salvation, which tells us in what it consists, which urges us to seek it, and which promises that, seeking it as it is offered to us, it will certainly become ours.<sup>49</sup>

He thus announces the topics which form the substratum of the discourse--and then proceeds to introduce them consecutively, illustrating and proving them with a richness and power of argument, founded on scripture, appealing to the common sense and convictions of men--which are well designed to carry the understanding and even the heart along with them.

He presents man's fallen condition, his need of salvation, and his inability to attain it by his own efforts.

The scriptures . . . . give a most melancholy and affecting picture of man's fallen condition, but the most melancholy and affecting part of it is, that he cannot by any efforts of his own, deliver himself from the ruin in which he is involved,--that in this view, his wisdom is but folly, his strength weakness, his righteousness filthy rags, and that, if no interposition had taken

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

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place on his behalf, he must have inevitably and forever  
perished.<sup>50</sup>

He then explains the scriptural meaning of being saved by faith and its consistency with grace, as well as the "necessity of the personal righteousness in those who shall finally be saved."<sup>51</sup>

The latter portion of the discourse, constituting more than half of it, is employed in the practical application of the doctrine of free grace already established. This section is particularly rich and full of power and here the author enlarges on the following observations:

1. To those . . . in whose personal experience the remarks now find a counterpart and an echo, . . . the subject should inspire you with gratitude . . . .

2. The subject we have been considering should teach you humility . . . .

3. This view of the doctrine of salvation also imparts comfort . . . .

4. The subject we have been considering should constrain us to cheerful and universal obedience . . . .<sup>52</sup>

These observations and injunctions are followed by some powerful appeals to the understanding and hearts of "those who reject the salvation of the gospel and despise

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-22.

the free grace by which it is provided."<sup>53</sup>

Thomson's theology was traditional Calvinism with an Evangelical emphasis, and he attempted to make it appealing in a day when many of its basic tenets were being neglected. He preached what he believed and did not fail to treat controversial or unpopular doctrines. His approach was essentially positive, but he did not hesitate to make frontal assaults on the errors of his day. His sermons on Universal Pardon are the best example of his pulpit ministrations in defending the doctrines he imbibed.

In 1828, Thomas Erskine, of Linlathen, published some essays on the subject Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, explaining how the "current theological terms such as Pardon, Salvation, Eternal Life, were, as he supposed, misinterpreted."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

This sermon was preached at the induction of the author's nephew, Rev. John W. Thomson, to the church and parish of Monedie, Scotland, and is followed by a short but suitable introduction of the young minister. Thomson tells the congregation that his "young friend":

. . . will deceive and disappoint me much, if he does not preach to you faithfully and earnestly the sovereign grace of God--the unsearchable riches of Christ--the doctrine of divine mercy through faith in a crucified Redeemer--and the necessity of holiness as produced by the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and as extending to all the affections of the heart, and to all the actions of life. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>54</sup> John Tulloch, Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century (London, 1885), p. 140.

Pardon was conceived as offered now to every sinner on condition of faith, Salvation as equivalent to Justification by faith, and Eternal Life as a life in the future . . . . According to him, Pardon was already made for every sinner in the mission and death of Christ.<sup>55</sup>

Thomson was not slow in taking up the traditional views denied by Erskine and defending them. There could not have been two minds more dissimilar than those of Erskine and Thomson. Erskine, in his outlook on religious questions, was subjective. Thomson, on the other hand, was objective and historical. Principal Tulloch says: "They were utterly incapable of understanding one another--Thomson being forensic, argumentative, systematic, rhetorical in the highest degree, and Erskine the very opposite of all this."<sup>56</sup>

In comparing the positions of Chalmers and Thomson on Erskine's essay on The Freeness of the Gospel, Tulloch, a Moderate, points out:

There was a large-heartedness in Chalmers that responded to its free and generous views . . . . But Dr. Andrew Thomson was the truer interpreter of the mind of Scotland as well as the differences between the new and the old theology. Whatever we may think of the spirit of his many criticisms, he saw clearly, and with logical acumen, within his own sphere of vision, and there is an argument as well as vindictive force in some of his replies.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

Thomson's series of twelve sermons, directed at the doctrine of Universal Pardon, were preached on the same text and were published with a lengthy appendix containing critical and expository notes. They were founded on Psalm cxxx. 7, 8: "Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." In discoursing upon these words, Thomson sought to make his argument clear and direct and applied numerous scripture passages to prove his propositions.

He preached a series of nine sermons on Infidelity from the same text.<sup>58</sup> In a letter to David Maclagan, Lord Cowan says:

I still remember the earnest and eloquent appeals to the heart and conscience, addressed to his people by the great preacher--his sermons on Infidelity in particular. What crowds they drew every afternoon for many sabbaths successively--for they were preached continuously--the passage and lobby being so crowded as scarcely to admit of the congregation getting to their seats.<sup>59</sup>

These sermons were written and published "under the general conviction that infidelity is the prevalent disease of the human heart, and that it is always, and in all

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<sup>58</sup> Hebrews 3:12. "Take heed, brethern, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

<sup>59</sup> David Maclagan, St. George's Edinburgh (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1876), p. 16.



circumstances, a subject of paramount importance."<sup>60</sup> He attempted to show the pernicious effects of infidelity on the virtue and happiness of mankind, and the guilt and danger in which it involves all who embrace it. He sought to prove that a rejection of Christianity naturally leads to speculative and practical atheism. In too many cases "the evil heart of unbelief" is chargeable upon many who assume the Christian name, and who seem to think it sufficient proof of their own faith that they condemn the religion of others.<sup>61</sup>

Thomson's eloquence in preaching is well illustrated in these sermons on infidelity:

Where is the balm which I may apply with effect to my wounded heart, after I have rejected the aid of the Almighty physician? Impose upon me whatever hardships you please; give me nothing but the bread of sorrow to eat; take away from me the friends in whom I had placed my confidence; lay me in the cold hut of poverty, and on the thorny bed of disease; set death before me in all its terrors; do all this,--only let me trust in my Savior, and 'pillow my head on the bosom of omnipotence'; and 'I will fear no evil,'--I will rise superior to affliction,--I will 'rejoice in my tribulation.' But let infidelity interpose between God and my soul, and draw its impenetrable veil over a future state of existence, and limit all my trust to the creatures of a day, and all my expectations to a few years as uncertain as they are short; and how shall I bear up, with fortitude or with cheerfulness, under the burden of distress? Or, where shall I find one drop of consolation to put into the bitter draught which has been given me to drink?

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<sup>60</sup> Andrew Thomson, Sermons on Infidelity (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1821), p. viii.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. ix.



I look over the whole range of this wilderness in which I dwell, but I see not one covert from the storm, not one leaf for the healing of my soul, nor one cup of cold water to refresh me in the weariness and faintings of my pilgrimage. O! What can I be but comfortless and wretched, when I am without Christ, without God and without hope?<sup>62</sup>

Thomson was greatly interested in the Foreign Mission program of the church and preached many mission sermons. He was persuaded that:

None who has tasted the grace of God, can be altogether indifferent to the spiritual wants of those who are still living in heathenism, walking on in darkness, without Bibles, without happiness, and without hope.<sup>63</sup>

He took an active part in the management of the various public charitable and benevolent institutions in Edinburgh and was called upon to preach many sermons on their behalf.<sup>64</sup>

Chalmers said:

He was truly a preacher of faith--yet his last words . . . may be regarded as his dying testimony to the worth of that charity which is greater than faith. I do not mean the charity of a mere contribution by the hand; but the charity of that done in the heart, which prompts all the services to humanity.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 150-151.

<sup>63</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 29, p. 571.

<sup>64</sup> Chalmers, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>65</sup> Loc. cit. His last Sermon, "preached with all his accustomed earnestness and zeal," was a pleading on behalf of the Infirmary of Edinburgh.

Thomson was vitally concerned that the message he had to convey was delivered in the most fitting and attractive manner. He read profusely and declared:

. . . it is the duty of every Christian minister, to enlarge and enrich his mind with every kind of knowledge to which he has access, that he may the more distinctly and forcibly illustrate those truths which it is, in a peculiar manner, his duty to declare.<sup>66</sup>

He would agree with A. B. Davidson, of a later generation, who maintained to his students that "all good literature is the most profitable study for the preacher."<sup>67</sup>

He was, by natural gifts and acquired habits, well qualified for the office of the Christian ministry. Four years after he was appointed to St. George's Church, J. G. Lockhart--the biographer and son-in-law of Sir Walter Scott--penned some "Clerical Portraits" of some of the most eminent clergymen of Edinburgh. Of Thomson he wrote:

Now Mr. Andrew Thomson strikes me to be, without exception, one of the most complete masters of this world's knowledge I have ever heard preach on either side of the Tweed; . . . . The person who hears him preach has none of the usual resources to which many are accustomed to retreat, when something is said from the pulpit which displeases their prejudices. They cannot pretend, even to themselves, that this is a secluded enthusiast who knows no better, and would not talk so, had he seen a little more of life. It is clear, from the moment he touches upon life, that he has looked at it narrowly as if that observation had been his ultimatum, not his mean.

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<sup>66</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 2, p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> W. M. MacGregor, The Making of a Preacher (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 68.

. . . it is no wonder that this man should have succeeded in establishing for himself a firm and lasting sway over the minds of his apparently elegant and fashionable audience. It has never, indeed, been my fortune to see, in any other audience of the kind, so many of the plain manifestations of attentive and rational interest during divine service . . . . I rejoice to find that Edinburgh possessed, in the heart of her society, the faithful ministrations of this masculine intellect; . . . . It is very seldom that the stream of fashion is seen to flow in a channel so safe, and a direction so beneficial.<sup>68</sup>

#### B. THE MINISTER OF THE CONGREGATION

Thomson was not only popular and effective as a preacher of the Gospel but he was very attentive and diligent as a pastor. He cultivated an intimate acquaintance with his people so that he might know how to apply his instructions to their necessities. He visited them often, in his ministerial capacity, and was in the habit of addressing to them suitable words of instruction and comfort.

. . . by the assiduity and prudence of his private ministrations and by the affectionate solicitude which he evinced for the spiritual interests of those committed to his care, he . . . seated himself so firmly in the hearts of his people, that . . . no clergyman in the city, established or dissenting, was more cordially revered and beloved by his congregation.<sup>69</sup>

He believed that a good pastor would "visit the sick, and afflicted, and the dying, and divide to each according

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<sup>68</sup> J. G. Lockhart, Clerical Portraits (Scot's Magazine, 1819), Vol. 84, Part II, pp. 115-116.

<sup>69</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 30, p. 136.

to their need.<sup>70</sup> From all accounts he made a special effort to accomplish this work among his people. Thomas McCrie says:

Nothing endeared him to his people so much and so deservedly as the attention he paid to the young and the sick; and of the happy art which he possessed in communicating instruction to the former, and administering advice and consolation to the latter . . . .<sup>71</sup>

Thomas Chalmers, in a funeral sermon preached after Thomson's sudden death, said:

. . . when the pastor of the church becomes the pastor of the family, and he (Thomson) who, in the crowded assembly, held imperial sway over every understanding, entered some parents' lowly dwelling, and prayed and wept along with them over their infants' dying bed . . . it is this which furnishes the key to every heart, and when the triumphs of charity are super-added to the triumphs of argument, then it is that he sits enthroned over the affections of a willing people.<sup>72</sup>

These words of Chalmers are significant when it is realized that with the revival of Evangelicalism, pastoral activity was also revived. Its reaction on the pulpit produced sermons which were adapted to the needs of the people, who were disposed to give more attention to what was said when it was apparent that the pastor was deeply interested in his flock. Thomson said:

. . . however excellent the pulpit addresses may be, its advantages are lost by the want of that affectionate week-day intercourse between the minister and his

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<sup>70</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 10, p. 100.

<sup>71</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 30, p. 136.

<sup>72</sup> Chalmers, op. cit., p. 22.

people, which is so endearing and so profitable to both parties.<sup>73</sup>

His genuine concern for the welfare of the people and of the Established Church led him to make the following observations:

We do not well see how any revival of religion can be reasonably looked for in our land, so long as the clergy are so inattentive to private pastoral duties. [*Italics in original*]

Our fears as to the future progress of the church, and the revival of true piety, will continue to be great indeed so long as we perceive an almost total disregard, in very many quarters, of that pointed charge of our blessed Redeemer to Peter, 'Feed my lambs.' . . . . We beg to know are our clergy sufficiently alive as to the importance of obtaining really Christian men to fill the ranks of our parochial schools? . . . . Has the religious instruction of young persons been made a distinct and regular exercise by the minister? Have the express directions of our statute book been at all attended to as they ought, in regard to a 'regular weekly catechising of some part of the parish'?<sup>74</sup>

Thomson spoke of the many and varied opportunities that were presented to the minister to make contact with the people: parents at the baptism of their children and the varied incidents of every week that bring with them numberless occasions of mutual personal communication between the minister and his flock.

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<sup>73</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 28, p. 654.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 653-654. (See Chapter on Education)

He commented, regretfully:

We say it with lamentation, ministers are not pastors, -- they keep at too great a distance from their people, -- there is a want of mutual intimate acquaintanceship, -- there is not the 'line upon line and precept upon precept,' -- the gospel is not preached 'from house to house,' nor is there equitable and skillful 'division of the word of life.' Till this apostolic method be revived, we look in vain for that kind of success which was enjoyed so largely in apostolic days.<sup>75</sup>

### C. THE MINISTER OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Thomson believed that revelation was never inconsistent with reason. Though the doctrines peculiar to revelation could not be discovered by human reason, nor even after they were known could they be comprehended by the human faculties, yet they did not contradict the dictates of enlightened reason. He believed that they were above reason, not contrary to it.

It would be absolutely impossible to believe a revelation which contradicts any ascertained principles of pure reason. This may be considered as an axiom in Theology; for a revelation must come from the same Being who has formed the mind of man and the constitution of nature, and we cannot conceive that the Word of God can ever contradict his works, or that He should command us to believe any doctrine which the reason He has given us compels us to reject.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>76</sup> Andrew Thomson, "Theology," The Edinburgh Encyclopedia, edited by David Brewster. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1830), Vol. 18, Part II, p. 545.



He believed, however, that one must be extremely careful to free reason from the influence of the passions, and from the power of those prejudices which tend to bias its decisions. If this was not done, doctrines and facts would be measured, not by the standard of reason, but by inclinations and feelings.

According to Thomson, the peculiar doctrines of revelation were: the trinity of persons in the individual Godhead; the incarnation of Christ; the expiation of sin by the Redeemer's sufferings and death; the efficacy of His intercession; and the mysterious communication of the believer's soul with the Divine Spirit.

He looked to the word of God, as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, for the only sure rules of faith and practice. He did not find in them a set treatise on any one of the great subjects which engage the attention of moral and religious beings. Though he found no such regular treatise in the Scriptures, all the materials of a regular system were there. The doctrines were deduced from facts which were not presented in any regular order. The very fact that no detailed system was given rendered it necessary to form one, in order that the truths of God could be profitably taught and understood.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 546.



The ways of God are very complicated; the manifestations of His will are infinitely diversified, and sometimes appear as if they were opposed to each other; and it is only by an enlarged view of his dispensations, and a careful comparison of the procedure of his providence, that we can see the beauties and estimate the value of that revelation which he has given. It is the greatest of all mistakes to suppose that a revelation has been given to save us the trouble of thinking; its object is to teach us to think aright, to prevent the waste and misapplication of our faculties, but not to supersede their exercise.<sup>78</sup>

A system of theology, according to Thomson, ought to be a clear statement of all the fundamental doctrines of scripture, with proofs that they are the doctrines which the scriptures teach. These doctrines should be so arranged as to show how they agree with and support each other, and how they combine to promote the same end: the glory of God and the happiness of man.<sup>79</sup>

The task of the systematizer of theology was:

. . . to seize those rich gems that are scattered in rich profusion throughout the volume of inspired truth; to arrange them in such order and to place them in such a light as is best calculated to exhibit the peculiar excellences of each; and at the same time to display the harmony and beauty of the whole combined.<sup>80</sup>

Though Thomson was fully persuaded that no degree of study would enable men to arrive at accurate conceptions of God and his government, without the aid of revelation, he

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<sup>78</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>79</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 22, p. 757.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 757-758.

was no less certain that revelation itself would not endow men with religious knowledge without study, meditation, and reflection. He would not say that profound study was necessary to make a good practical Christian, inasmuch as he believed that those who were imbued with a spirit of Christianity were led to a conscientious discharge of its various duties, though they may at the same time be unable to give a connected view of its doctrines. It was necessary, however, that some be able to do this. He knew of no subject that required "a greater variety of talent, extent of information, and application of judgment, than the successful illustration of the doctrines and duties of Christianity."<sup>81</sup>

On the origin and authority of the Holy Scriptures, Thomson believed with the apostle, that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God." Mere human wisdom was not adequate to give the right interpretation of scripture facts, and to deduce from them their legitimate consequences. Man could never, with confidence, build his hopes on doctrines which derived their authority merely from the opinions and interpretations of fallible men.

It is as necessary to know that the record containing a Divine revelation is uncorrupted, and infallible in its information, as it is to know that a revelation came originally from God; and we might as well be without a

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<sup>81</sup> Thomson, "Theology," p. 546.

revelation altogether, as have one embodied in a record, on whose accuracy we cannot depend.<sup>82</sup>

He felt it was evident that the writers of the Holy Scriptures exercised their own judgment in commenting on the events which they revealed, though there is such striking agreement in their sentiments. He considered that their understandings were enlightened, their imaginations chastened, and their minds purified by a superintending influence. This influence led them to the same interpretation and the same conclusion, though the facts were presented to their senses, and revealed in their writings, in different points of view.<sup>83</sup> He was aware that these facts sometimes appeared inconsistent with each other but to his mind this inconsistency was not real, but apparent.

Particulars different, but not inconsistent; varied, but not contradictory, are presented to our view; and we are thus furnished with an addition of knowledge, not with an opposition of facts.<sup>84</sup>

He believed that the scriptures explained the nature and character of God but that they contained no labored arguments to prove his existence. It would have been mockery and misapplication of reason to have adduced metaphysical arguments to prove what was demonstrated to the senses.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 547.

<sup>83</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 26, pp. 521-522.

<sup>84</sup> Thomson, "Theology," p. 548.

The absence of inductive reasoning in the scriptures partially confirmed the authenticity of the record and the genuineness of the facts which it contains.<sup>85</sup>

Thomson considered the attributes of God to be of two classes; His communicable perfections such as--wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth; and His incommunicable or essential attributes as--His eternity, self-existence, immutability, and omnipresence. Man cannot participate in the incommunicable attributes, since they constitute the essential nature of the Deity, and without them God would not be an object of religious homage and adoration.<sup>86</sup>

The providence of God was proved, to Thomson's mind, by the existing state of the universe. To suppose that the world and its inhabitants could exist without the immediate care and superintendence of God was to suppose that they were independent of His power. If limits are to be assigned to the power of God, it is limited by the fact that He cannot do anything that is unworthy of Himself, nor make anything independent of His power. To create any being, or anything absolutely independent would be to impart his own incommunicable perfections. This would be impossible, inasmuch as to make anything as great as the uncreated Deity exceeds

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 549.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 550.

even the power of omnipotence. Thomson saw a divine energy in everything that existed. That which God had created retained its form and qualities, only in consequence of those laws which He had established, and which preserved their force only because His will kept them in operation.<sup>87</sup>

The scriptures present information respecting the mode in which the divine nature subsists, which reason could never have suggested. The doctrine of the Trinity could not be found except among those who had received it, directly or indirectly, from the sacred scriptures. Something similar, Thomson admitted, had been taught by the schools of both Plato and Pythagoras, but these were not the New Testament teachings regarding the Trinity. The Trinity, however, is nowhere announced in the New Testament as a new doctrine, and neither is it formally taught. It is taken for granted, and referred to as a thing that was well known and not as a doctrine which had been unheard of before. He was not certain whether this doctrine was known to the Jews under the Old Testament dispensation but believed it to be evident that the Jews had some notion of plurality as connected with the Divine nature.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 550-551.

The attributes and perfections of God the Father are manifested in the works of creation, providence, and redemption. To Thomson's mind the doctrine of predestination was unquestionably taught in the Holy Scriptures. For God to predestinate and to foreknow amounted to one and the same thing.

. . . God knows all things from the beginning, because in Him all things subsist; He knows every event before it is unfolded in the course of His providence, because it forms part of His eternal plans: . . . He knows all things, because he has ordained them.<sup>89</sup>

The divinity and distinct personality of the Holy Spirit is proved by scripture. His divinity is proved by the reproof of the Apostle Peter to Ananias: "Why has Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? Thou hast not lied to men, but to God."<sup>90</sup> His distinct personality is proved by the words of Christ: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; and whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."<sup>91</sup>

Concerning the work of the Holy Spirit, Thomson said:

. . . The Holy Ghost, the third person in the blessed Trinity, exercises towards us the offices of a Sanctifier and Comforter; that, by His powerful influence, the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 554.

<sup>90</sup> Acts 3:4.

<sup>91</sup> Matthew 12:31-32.



understanding of man is enlightened in all heavenly knowledge, and his heart changed from all evil dispositions; and that, by the discipline of God's providence, and the dealings of his grace, we are enabled to keep His commandments, and to resign ourselves to His holy will, and are in due time prepared for the exercises and enjoyments of the 'spirits of just men made perfect.'<sup>92</sup>

The Holy Spirit is, in every page of the New Testament, specifically kept in our view, as the great and constantly operating agent in applying to believers the purchased benefits of redemption.<sup>93</sup>

As to the nature of Christ, Thomson held to the essential article in the orthodox creed that He is both God and man.

. . . . so intimately are the two natures connected, and yet so distinct are they in their properties, that he is sometimes spoken of in Scripture, as possessing only the attributes of God; and at other times as endowed exclusively with the feelings and faculties of man. He is 'God over all blessed forever,' and he is also the 'man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.'<sup>94</sup>

When Christ appears as a Mediator, he assumes a distinct office, and one of which certain circumstances may be predicated which are not applicable to Christ either in his divine, or his human nature, when separately considered. When he says that he can do nothing of himself, but as he is commanded by the Father, he speaks of his mediatorial office. In this office a definite work was given him to perform, and from which he could not possibly deviate without frustrating

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<sup>92</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 7, p. 251.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>94</sup> Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 559.



the work of God, and deserting the task which he had undertaken. In this respect, a limitation was laid even on his omnipotence, and he was bound to fulfill every article stipulated in the eternal covenant between him and the Father. His power, however, was restricted only by his own will, and he submitted to a voluntary humiliation, and a voluntary relinquishment of power, that he might accomplish a work which could not have been affected by any other means.<sup>95</sup>

Thomson carefully abstained from all attempts to explain the manner of the incarnation. He had, however, no hesitation in saying that the incarnation of the Son of God presented an intelligible view of the Almighty, and of the duties which were owed to Him. When men took what was called a philosophical view of the nature of God, they were soon lost and overwhelmed in the immensity of the subject.

. . . most philosophical inquirers, who have not had the light of the gospel for their guide, have been bewildered in the vast generality of the subject; and have regarded the Supreme Being rather as an object of speculative contemplation, than as entitled to the affections, and the worship of his creatures.<sup>96</sup>

The ignorant and the uninformed, however, fell into the opposite error. They could form no conception of God, but as a being resembling themselves, and therefore they represented Him by forms and images adapted to their

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<sup>95</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>96</sup> Loc. cit.

prejudices and feelings. These sources of error are removed by the incarnation of Christ, who came "to show the tender care, the paternal love, the constant providence of our Heavenly Father."<sup>97</sup>

In Christ, a definite object of worship was presented to man. He was once a visible and tangible object of affection and now retains, at the right hand of God, the human nature along with the divine, and is still establishing additional claims to the gratitude and love of men by making continual intercession for them.

There is no other way of worshipping God with acceptance, than through Christ. There is a vast amount of meaning in these words of Christ: "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me."<sup>98</sup> These words, said Thomson, not only imply that Christ is the way by which men come to the enjoyment of God in his heavenly kingdom, but that there is no other way in which man can form any accurate conception of him, or yield to him a rational service. In speaking of man's approach to God, Thomson said:

. . . we see his glory shining with a mild radiance, and a qualified lustre, in the person of his Son, not so intense as to prevent us from approaching Him; or to deter us from imitating Him; but drawing us to God by

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<sup>97</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>98</sup> John 14:6.

the most powerful attractions, and teaching us to aspire to the imitation and the enjoyment of the Father of our spirits.<sup>99</sup>

Thomson believed that if Christ had not possessed the power of working miracles, he would have been destitute of the strongest evidence of his pretensions. He says:

. . . Christianity, (including under this name the religion of the Bible at large), is the only system of religious worship professedly founded on miracles. Our Lord publicly appeals to them in the confirmation of his doctrine, and as proofs of his divine mission.<sup>100</sup>

In the establishment of a religion of such high pretensions as Christianity, man had a right to expect the strongest evidence that could possibly be given, consistent with the plans of God's government. To Thomson, the mind could conceive nothing more decisive than the miracles performed by our Lord and his apostles. It was not reasonable that those signs were to be repeated every successive generation. If man still required a sign from heaven to confirm his faith, he could only be gratified through the medium of candid and diligent inquiry into the nature of evidence of the miracles recorded in Scripture.

He believed that the most important miracle recorded in scripture was the miracle of the resurrection; "for if it be false, none of the rest can be true; or if they be true,

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<sup>99</sup> Thomson, op. cit., p. 560..

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 562.

they are of no avail."<sup>101</sup> He was convinced that the fact of the resurrection completely accounted for the zeal and the success of the apostles and the first preachers of Christianity.

Numerous as the miracles were, none was ever displayed to establish a mystery unconnected with the life and hopes of a Christian. The most mysterious parts of the Christian creed have a direct bearing on faith and practice.<sup>102</sup>

It cannot be said that Thomson made any distinct contribution to the theological thought of his day. Concerning his theology, Chalmers had this to say:

His was the olden theology of Scotland; a thoroughly devoted son of the church, he was through life, the firm, the unflinching advocate of its articles, and its formularies, and its rights, and the whole polity of its constitution and discipline. His creed he derived by inheritance from the fathers of the Scottish reformation; not, however, as based on human authority, but as based and upholden on the authority of scripture alone.<sup>103</sup>

Thomson summed up his own position in these words: "Of that theology which is systematized and articulated in the standards of the Church of Scotland, we glory in being the zealous admirers."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 563.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 572.

<sup>103</sup> Buchanan, op. cit., pp. 177-178.

<sup>104</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 19, p. 257.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CHURCHMAN

#### A. THE CHURCHMAN IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

As a minister of the Church of Scotland, Thomson was a member of her judicatories, entrusted with the functions of an administrator of her laws. He felt that it was the duty of every minister to appear regularly in his place in the church courts, and to put forth his best efforts in the interests of Christianity and of the Establishment. However faithful and laborious the ministers might be in their parochial tasks, Thomson regarded the church judicatories as another sphere where they had important obligations to fulfill. A large proportion of the burden of the business of these assemblies was placed upon him because of his genuine interest and abilities.<sup>1</sup>

He was well qualified to be the leader of the Evangelical Party.

He not merely inherited the principles of Knox, and Melville, and Henderson--he was himself another of these

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter deals primarily with Thomson's recorded appearances in the General Assembly and with his addresses on those occasions. The Edinburgh Presbytery Minutes for the years from 1811 to 1831, the period of Thomson's ministry in Edinburgh, have been lost--rendering research into this phase of his life impossible. The Edinburgh Presbytery Minutes for the year 1810 record that he was elected Moderator of the Presbytery for the first time on June 27th of that year. Minutes of Edinburgh Presbytery, 1810 (Records in the Church of Scotland Library).

giant men. Fearless as Knox, profoundly skilled, like Melville, in ecclesiastical affairs, and gifted, like Henderson, with that ready and commanding eloquence so indispensable to a leader of a popular assembly; he belonged to that same high order of minds as that illustrious triumvirate. He was . . . instinct with their spirit; in him the very genius of the great reformers of the church lived again; their intense love of liberty, their unsparing and uncompromising enmity against all corruptions and abuses, their inextinguishable hatred of tyranny and arbitrary power; and, above all, their zeal in promoting the religious culture and intellectual improvement of the people, and their resolute and unflinching maintenance of the spiritual independence of the church and the rights of the Christian people, formed the grand distinguishing characteristics of Thomson's character and life.<sup>2</sup>

His close friend and associate, Thomas McCrie, the biographer of Knox and Melville, says:

Dr. Thomson was by constitution a reformer; he felt a strong sympathy with those great men who, in a former age, won renown, by assailing the hydra of error, and of religious tyranny; and his character partook of theirs. . . . he bore no inconsiderable resemblance to Luther, both in his excellences and defects.<sup>3</sup>

Another Scottish Church Historian, John Cunningham, states:

Thomson . . . died young, but not so young that he left his character stamped on his age. Above all Scotch ecclesiastics he was like Andrew Melville. He had the same intrepidity, the same manliness of sentiment, the same fondness for debate, the same overbearing dogmatism, the common infirmity of powerful minds.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Buchanan, The Ten Years Conflict (Edinburgh: Blackie and Son, New Edition, 1863), p. 176

<sup>3</sup> Thomas McCrie, Character of Thomson (found in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, Vol. 30, p. 137; and the Scotsman newspaper, Vol. XV, No. 1163).

<sup>4</sup> John Cunningham, The Church History of Scotland (Edinburgh: James Thin, Second Edition, 1882), Vol. II, p. 447.



There is a reference to Thomson in the Life of Dr. Chalmers in which the author remarks:

It was as a debater in the ecclesiastical courts that Dr. Thomson shone pre-eminent. He had studied the constitution and made himself familiar with the practice of these courts. Prompt, self-possessed, and furnished with almost every kind of needful weapon, he varied the closest and most crushing argument with sallies of broad humor and shafts of playful satire. He rushed into debate as a war-horse into battle, rejoicing in the conflict, merciless, indeed, in his onslaught, but generous to the honourable foe.<sup>5</sup>

One of the greatest Parliamentary orators of his time, Lord Henry Brougham, said on one occasion, that there lived but one man whom he feared to meet in debate, and that he was Andrew Thomson.<sup>6</sup>

In a sermon preached on the occasion of Thomson's death, Thomas Chalmers reminded his hearers that:

In the business of debate, though great execution is often done by the heavy artillery of prepared speeches, yet the effect of these is incalculably aided by the well-timed discharge of those smaller fire-arms which are used in the skirmishing of extemporaneous warfare. I only knew one individual in our church (Dr. Thomson) who had this talent in perfection; and in his hands it was anything but a small fire-arm. Would that there were twenty alike able and intrepid, and as pure as I judge him to have been, on many of the great occasions of ecclesiastical polity . . . . But it forms a very rare combination when so much power and so much promptitude go together, or when one unites in his speaking the quickness of

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<sup>5</sup> Jean L. Watson, Life of Andrew Thomson, D.D. (Edinburgh: James Gemmell, 1882), p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Bayne, The Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Second Edition, 1894), p. 40.



opportune suggestion with the momentum of weighty and laborious preparation.<sup>7</sup>

C. G. McCrie writes thus of Thomson's service to evangelical religion:

As a debater in church courts Andrew Thomson was unrivalled. He did what neither Erskine nor Moncrieff attempted to do, he formed a party to face the Moderate ranks, and gathered and marshalled the younger men in the church who were willing to fight for spiritual independence and Christian rights inside the Establishment. And so before his sudden death in the twenty-ninth year of his ministry there was formed into a compact phalanx a new party whose unfurled banner had blazoned upon it, The Headship of Christ, and the Rights of the Christian People.<sup>8</sup>

Another writer declares that "it was as a leader in the open field of public life that Dr. Thomson stood out pre-eminent, conspicuous, alone. In the church courts, on the platform, in public controversy, there was no man that came near him."<sup>9</sup>

Thomson was consistently attached to the ancient principles of his church and his burning zeal for her spiritual independence is well illustrated in the proceedings of the General Assembly of 1820. The King, George III, had died in

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Chalmers, A Sermon Preached . . . on the Occasion of the Death of the Rev. Dr. Andrew Thomson (Glasgow: William Collins, 1831), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> C. G. McCrie, The Church of Scotland, Her Divisions and Her Re-Unions (Edinburgh: MacNiven and Wallace, 1901), p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Watson, op. cit., p. 104. (Excerpt from a letter from William Cousins to Jean L. Watson).

January of that year and his son, George IV, succeeded him to the throne. An "Order" of the Privy Council dated 12th February was, by the King's authority, communicated to all the ministers of the Church of Scotland.<sup>10</sup> The order was as follows:

In pursuance of an act passed in the tenth year of her late Majesty Queen Ann, and of another act passed in the thirty-second year of his late Majesty King George the Third, wherein provision is made for praying for the royal family in that part of Great Britain called Scotland, it is ordered by his majesty in council, that henceforth every minister and preacher shall, in his respective church, congregation, or assembly, pray in express words for his most sacred Majesty King George, and all the royal family; of which all persons concerned are hereby required to take notice and govern themselves accordingly.<sup>11</sup>

Thomson felt that the ministers should offer fervent supplications to God for the Royal Family, but moved:

That it be declared by the General Assembly that no civil authority can constitutionally prescribe either forms or heads of prayer to the ministers and preachers of this Church, and that the orders in Council, which have been issued from time to time respecting prayers for the royal family, are inconsistent with the rights and privileges secured by law to our ecclesiastical establishment; but that, as these orders appear to have originated in mistake or inadvertency, and not in any intention to interfere with our modes of worship, the General Assembly do not consider it to be necessary to proceed further in this matter at present.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Henry W. Moncrieff, The Free Church Principle: Its History and Character (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1844), pp. 194-195.

<sup>11</sup> George Grub, An Ecclesiastical History of Scotland (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1861), Vol. IV, p. 157.

<sup>12</sup> Moncrieff, op. cit., p. 195.

He concluded his brief address with expressions of loyalty to the Royal Family and the House of Hanover.

Thomson's motion met with immediate opposition in the Assembly but he endeavored to defend it. He believed, with Melville, that it was an acknowledged and incontrovertible principle of the Establishment that it had no spiritual head upon earth and, consequently, the King in Council had no right to interfere in the church's worship. He declared that this:

. . . was a vital privilege in our ecclesiastical constitution: it was of essential importance to the safety of the church, as might be seen from the struggles that were made to deprive us of it by a persecuting government . . . it was that for which our forefathers contended so nobly--for which they fought and bled--and which, by their sufferings and their perseverance, they secured to us . . . .<sup>13</sup>

This was a privilege, he believed, with which the church could not part without endangering its whole structure.

The fact that the church was ordered to pray for the Royal Family and that the order was in the form of liturgy, met with vigorous opposition in Thomson. He was aware that such things had been done before and if the General Assembly had not hitherto resisted the encroachment, so much more requisite was it to begin that resistance. He believed that obsta principiis was an excellent maxim; but it was bad logic

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew Thomson, editor, The Edinburgh Christian Instructor (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1810-1831), Vol. 19, p. 372. [Hereinafter known as the E. C. I.]

to say that because the mischief had not been withstood at the beginning, it should be allowed to remain without challenge or opposition. He had always thought such orders unconstitutional and had often wondered that they were not noticed by some zealous defenders of ecclesiastical rights. He had ventured to suggest to some of his friends the propriety of taking the question up when an order was issued; but he supposed that there had been sometimes a sort of indifference to the matter, and at other times, the fear of man. Thomson, himself, was troubled with no such fear and felt no such indifference.

He brought the subject before the Assembly on this occasion because it was the first opportunity that had presented itself when he felt that he could do it seasonably. If the Assembly shared his views of the Order in Council concerning the church's prayers, he called upon it "to take the most prudent method of preventing their recurrence, and not to consider the silence which had been hitherto observed in regard to them, as any good reason for persevering in conniving at them."<sup>14</sup>

Thomson felt that the evil of the Order in Council lay, in the first place, in the fact that they effected the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 373. General Assembly Records, 1820. (Church of Scotland Library.)

safety and integrity of the national church.<sup>15</sup> He was convinced that the efficiency of the Presbyterian Establishment depended upon its principles being kept pure and inviolate. He could conceive of no greater violation of its principles than that which consisted in assuming the power of regulating the prayers of its ministers and preachers. If this was tamely submitted to, there was no kind or degree of encroachment which need occasion alarm, because "it goes to the very vitals of the constitution, as a church having no temporal head and no liturgy."<sup>16</sup>

He did not believe that the Privy Council had intentionally invaded the rights of the Church of Scotland, but he was ready to maintain that there was far greater danger where there was mere mistake or inadvertency, than where there was a real and obvious design. In the latter case, the Assembly would feel itself constrained immediately to take up arms, and assume the attitude of defence and resistance. But in the former case, one encroachment would be allowed to pass after another without exciting alarm, until the right that had been violated was absolutely forgotten, and any attempt to recover it would prove either impracticable or extremely difficult. He would not say that the

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<sup>15</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 19, pp. 373-374.

government would found any permanent claim on the numerous precedents which were allowed, through carelessness, to be established; but he did<sup>not</sup> know what was to be the disposition and character of future governments, and therefore he thought it wise to secure themselves against all hazard. To support his arguments, Thomson drew his illustrations from Scottish Church history. He asserted:

Everyone who is acquainted with the principles and history of our ecclesiastical establishment, must know that one of the privileges for which our forefathers successfully contended, was that of praying without prescribed formularies.<sup>17</sup>

Thomson believed, in the second place, that the Orders in Council were evil "because they affected the attachments of the people."<sup>18</sup> The people of Scotland in general were attached to the Established Church, but their attachment was not blind or inconsiderate. This attachment was not formed by what they saw of the labors of their ministers, but was founded upon a firm conviction that "the principles of Presbytery were those of the Bible," and the only ones that were effectual in securing the purity of religion, and the edification of the people.<sup>19</sup> He wondered if this affection would continue when they saw their leaders tamely allowing

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<sup>17</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 19, p. 259.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

<sup>19</sup> Loc. cit.



the most essential of these principles to be violated. He feared that the Dissenters would be furnished with an excellent reason, which they would quickly appropriate, for exciting disgust among the people of the Establishment.

He was keenly aware that the church had suffered much by dissent and felt that its members had been driven away in great numbers by the plan of administration which had been pursued. The Dissenters were a numerous body and possessed a measure of respectability and influence, and he could not but regard a passive acquiescence in the "Orders in Council" as directly calculated to add to their strength, and in that way be hostile to the ecclesiastical constitution.<sup>20</sup>

To his mind, the "Orders in Council" were evil, in the third place, because "they affected the authority of the Crown, and the respect which was paid it."<sup>21</sup> He told the Assembly that at no time and in no circumstances was it a right or a safe thing that the orders of the King in Council should be disobeyed. Many ministers, he knew, would be reduced to the necessity of disobeying the order respecting prayer for the royal family. They could not conscientiously adopt any prescribed form of words. He was convinced that they would adhere to the principles of that church to which

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>21</sup> Loc. cit.



they were bound by their ordination vows to maintain in her integrity, and would use their own discretion and their own language in their public devotions. The people, in observing this, would suppose that their ministers had no great deference for the injunctions, whatever they might be, with similar disregard. Thus the authority of the crown, which he felt "should ever be held sacred," would be necessarily brought into contempt. To him it was better to let the Privy Council know that the Assembly could not submit to their orders in cases of worship, and thus to prevail upon them to give up the practice of issuing them, and to leave the ministers to do their duty in their own way.<sup>22</sup>

Thomson further believed that the orders alluded to would have an unhappy effect on the respectability, comfort, and usefulness of the clergy. Nothing should be countenanced or permitted which tended to put them at variance with their people, or to lessen their influence among them.

He called upon the Assembly to do what it could to prevent the evils that would result from such an order. If the members of the Assembly agreed to his motion, either it would have the effect of preventing the Privy Council from issuing any future orders respecting their form of prayer,

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<sup>22</sup> Loc. cit.

or it would give the countenance of that supreme ecclesiastical court to all those ministers who felt it a matter of conscience to pray without regard to the terms prescribed to them by civil authority. He believed that in either case it would secure the "independence and the comfort" of the ministers of the Church in the discharge of their public duties.<sup>23</sup>

Thomson's motion was again read to the Assembly and seconded by Sir James Wellwood Moncrieff, Advocate, a capable and active member of the Evangelical Party.<sup>24</sup>

The leaders of the Moderate Party opposed the motion but admitted that Thomson had "treated a very delicate subject with a degree of temper, decorum, and propriety," which they had to commend.<sup>25</sup> The important thing to notice, however, is that none of them, except the Solicitor-General, challenged the soundness of his main contention. Dr. Cook, a Moderate leader, entirely agreed with the proposition laid down by the Evangelical leader: that no authority could constitutionally prescribe forms or heads of prayer to the church. He believed, however, that the motion should "legally" be submitted to a committee, as it was the uniform practice of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>24</sup> Moncrieff, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>25</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 19, p. 376.

the Assembly to let no business come before it except through a committee.<sup>26</sup> He believed that the government of the Church of Scotland could be viewed in two lights, as "civil and ecclesiastical," and he did not see "the utility of making out too nicely the line of demarcation between the civil and ecclesiastical powers."<sup>27</sup> He denied that there was any infringement on the liberties of the church in the orders.

The Lord Justice-Clerk Boyle spoke along similar lines in attempting to explain away the language of the Order as not involving authoritative command, but merely indicating the Royal wish. His motion was as follows:

Whereas the independence of the Church of Scotland, in all matters of faith, worship, and discipline, is fully established by law, the General Assembly finds it unnecessary and inexpedient to adopt any declaration with regard to the late or any former order in council relative to prayers for His Majesty and the Royal Family.<sup>28</sup>

Much was said by eloquent speakers on both sides of the issue, but in replying to what was said in opposition to his motion, Thomson presented the most logical, forceful, and witty address of the day. He answered his opponents in clear and straight-forward manner and concluded his discussion on

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>27</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Moncrieff, op. cit., p.198.

the subject with words which have been referred to as "pathetic and almost prophetic."<sup>29</sup>

It is nothing but my warm and inviolable attachment to the Church that urges me to make my stand against this encroachment. I can lay my hand on my heart and say, that I sincerely think the orders in Council a manifest encroachment on its independence, and I trust that the breath of official authority, breathe from what quarter it may, will never be allowed to wither one leaf of that Plant of Renown which our fathers watered with their blood, and of which we have been permitted, by a kind Providence, to eat the pleasant fruits.<sup>30</sup>

When the vote of the Assembly was taken, Thomson's motion was defeated by a considerable majority. This debate, however, was an excellent demonstration of the keen and conscientious vigilance with which the Evangelical Party and its leader guarded the "soleness of that allegiance which the church owed her heavenly King."<sup>31</sup>

. . . the debate showed that the members in the minority were ready to avow their principles and maintain them to the uttermost, while those in the majority seemed rather to apologize for the course which they adopted, than to defend it.

This discussion was indicative of the jealousy with which the popular party now watched any attempt of the secular authority to interfere with the worship of the Established Church.<sup>32</sup>

Lord Moncrieff held that:

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<sup>29</sup> Bayne, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> Moncrieff, op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>31</sup> Bayne, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Grub, op. cit., p. 159.

The result was really a triumph for Mr. Thomson, though he and his supporters did not, after what had been said, think it reasonable to depart from the construction which they had put upon the terms of the document, while frankly conceding the plea of mistake or oversight on the part of His Majesty's advisors.<sup>33</sup>

In considering this debate, one may be inclined to think that all this discussion arose out of exhibition on the part of Thomson to make much of small issues, because of clerical or oratorical vanity; but Bayne says that "the true-blue followers of the old banner throughout the manses and homes of Scotland did not think so."<sup>34</sup>

It was obviously no secondary matter on which, on such an occasion,--the recent accession of a sovereign,--Andrew Thomson could have ventured to make such a stand. It was because the church had in her best days guarded her spiritual independence as the apple of her eye that he spoke out.<sup>35</sup>

Thomson appeared at his best in the Church Courts when he was convinced that he was guarding the spiritual independence of the church and when he was defending the rights of the people against the inroads of patronage.

The parish of Little Dunkeld in Perthshire had become vacant and the crown, under the guidance of its Scottish advisors, presented to the benefice, a Mr. Thomas Nelson, a probationer of the church who knew nothing of Gaelic.

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<sup>33</sup> Moncrieff, op. cit., p. 199.

<sup>34</sup> Bayne, loc. cit.

<sup>35</sup> Loc. cit.

A certain proportion of the people of the parish spoke Gaelic and they had always had a Gaelic speaking minister.<sup>36</sup>

The case was discussed in the Presbytery of Dunkeld in October, 1824, and the court refused to proceed in the settlement of Nelson in the parish. In April of the following year the Synod of Perth and Stirling confirmed the sentence of the Presbytery and the case was brought before the General Assembly in May, 1825. The Moderates defended the appointment and resolved to give effect to it. They made reference in their speeches to the fact that it was a royal presentation and, therefore, peculiarly entitled to instant acquiescence.

The debate was one of much interest and powerful conflict. Professor Hugh Watt referred to it as "one of the most keenly contested pitched battles for many years."<sup>37</sup> The counsel at the bar included some of the most distinguished advocates of Scotland: Francis Jeffrey, Henry Cockburn, Patrick Robertson, and Robert Jameson. Among the members of the Assembly who shared in the discussion were: Andrew Thomson, Thomas Chalmers, Robert Burns of Paisley, Principal MacFarlan of Glasgow, Solicitor General Hope, Duncan McNeill,

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<sup>36</sup> Bayne, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>37</sup> Hugh Watt, Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1943), p. 80.



and James Moncrieff.<sup>38</sup>

After a long period of vigorous debate, a motion was made by Principal Nichol and seconded by David Richie:

. . . that the Assembly reverse the sentences of the Presbytery of Dunkeld, and the Synod of Perth and Stirling; . . . that the facts of the case are not sufficiently before the Assembly for enabling them to give a decision; remit the cause to the Presbytery, with instructions to sustain the presentation to Mr. Nelson, in the first instance, and thereafter to make an inquiry into the circumstances of the parish generally, for the purpose of ascertaining whether the inhabitants do or do not understand English, so as to comprehend a sermon in that language.<sup>39</sup>

Another motion was made by Andrew Thomson and seconded by Thomas Chalmers to the effect that:

. . . whereas it has been ascertained that the parish of Little Dunkeld is a Highland parish, and has enjoyed the benefit of a Gaelic ministry from time immemorial, and whereas it is admitted that Mr. Nelson is unacquainted with the Gaelic language, the General Assembly instruct the presbytery of Dunkeld not to proceed in the settlement of Mr. Nelson as Minister of Little Dunkeld; and, further, instruct the presbytery respectfully to communicate this decision to the officers of the crown, that a presentation may be issued to a qualified presentee within six months from this date.<sup>40</sup>

When the votes were cast, Thomson's motion was carried by a majority of 107 to 99. This was a small majority but it

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<sup>38</sup> A Report of the Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 24th May 1825 (Edinburgh: John Lindsay and Co., Second Edition, 1825).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 44. Edinburgh Christian Instructor, Vol. 23, p. 567.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 73.



was a significant victory for the Evangelical Party. Moncrieff called it a "remarkable victory" for Thomson and said that "his speech on this occasion was an extraordinary example of his oratorical power combined with religious earnestness."<sup>41</sup>

In his speech before this General Assembly, Thomson again proved himself true to the genius and history of his church, by his "vigilant assertion of the rights of the Christian people."<sup>42</sup>

In this debate "his artillery was in perfect order, and his light armour all at hand."<sup>43</sup> One writer says that "this was clearly a case which admitted of, and merited, his whole powers of ridicule and humour being brought into play in the first instance."<sup>44</sup> Thomson dealt, in logical order, with the arguments of his opponents. He expressed his sincere

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<sup>41</sup> Moncrieff, op. cit., p. 199.

<sup>42</sup> Bayne, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> David MacLagan, St. George's Edinburgh (Edinburgh: Nelson and Sons, 1876), p. 22.

MacLagan says that "the whole of Dr. Thomson's procedure in this historical case serves to bring out in relief, the bold, able, evangelical man, who in days of darkness in the Church shook it from its slumbers, and dragged into light the men and their manners whose cold indifference and shallow expedients were a discredit and disgrace to the Church of Christ." MacLagan, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Loc. cit.

sympathy toward the presentee but would not allow his sympathies to get the better of his sense of duty to the church and to the people.

We have heard much of his talents and attainments, and I am not disposed to question any part of the eulogium pronounced upon him . . . . But still I must not and cannot forget that he is destitute of one endowment as necessary as any of those which he is said to possess,--he is not endowed with a knowledge of the Gaelic . . . . He may be wiser than his teachers, and than all the ancients; but then he has no Gaelic. He may have more Greek and Latin than the professors under whom he studied these learned languages; but still he is ignorant of the Gaelic. He may be a profounder Theologian than was John Calvin himself; but the loss is, he is void of Gaelic. His eloquence may be more splendid, and powerful, and overwhelming than that of my reverend friend beside me (Dr. Chalmers); but with all this he knows not a word of Gaelic, and that is sufficient to determine us against finding him a qualified presentee.<sup>45</sup>

He believed that this case was one of great importance, not only as it affected the parish of Little Dunkeld, but also as it affected every parish in the Highlands of Scotland. There were some characteristics of the Highlanders which Thomson did not care for but he confessed:

As a social being, my heart warms to their generous hospitality. As a patriot, I admire the unconquerable valour they have ever shown in defence of their country. As a Christian, I love their immortal souls. And as a Christian minister, I feel myself bound and constrained to protect them, as far as I can, from all attempts to encroach upon their spiritual privileges and to impair their spiritual well-being. And on that account it is that I stand up in the General Assembly this evening to oppose the measure contemplated by the complaining party at your bar, and by their supporters in this house.

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<sup>45</sup> General Assembly Report, op. cit., p. 67.

Sir, I forbid the banns between Mr. Nelson, the Presentee, and the Parish of Little Dunkeld.<sup>46</sup>

His address was made more effective by the skillful use of telling illustrations and by the application of his delightful sense of humor. The parish of Little Dunkeld, he said, "is called the mouth of the Highlands, and surely it may be presumed that the mouth of the Highlands must have a Gaelic tongue in it."<sup>47</sup>

In the concluding portion of his address he eloquently contrasted the recent Foreign Mission movement of the Church with the placing of a minister among a people who could neither understand nor appreciate his efforts, because they could not understand his language. He did not want it to be said that from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland there had issued:

. . . a decree which, in the spirit of reckless and relentless despotism, throws up an impassable barrier, builds a wall so thick that it cannot be penetrated, and so high that it cannot be scaled, between the poor destitute Highlander and those religious ordinances by which he was wont to be invigorated for his duties and comforted in his sorrows,--a decree which, instead of lessening the local disadvantages with which his spiritual lot is beset . . . goes on to make all his sabbaths silent, and to shut against him, and hermetically to seal up from him, that humble but hallowed structure in which he had been so often privileged to worship his Savior and his

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<sup>46</sup> General Assembly Report, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

God,--a decree which forbids him ever again to taste the joy which he experienced in the years that are gone, when, on the morning of the holy day, he welcomed the pastor who came to minister to him the blessings of the gospel in accents that he both understood and loved . . . .<sup>48</sup>

The question of "pluralities," or the holding of more than one office by ministers, came into the arena of vigorous discussion in the Church about the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. There was nothing uncommon in a minister holding a chair in a university and, at the same time, serving as minister of a parish in the city in which the university was located. It was, however, an unusual thing for a minister to be at once the occupant of an academic chair, and the minister of a parish several miles from the university seat.<sup>49</sup>

There were many capable and excellent men in the Establishment who vindicated for the church and her clergy the right to take a large part in secular and, especially, in literary work. These members of the Moderate Party believed that such freedom of thought and work would do much to liberalize the spirit of the church and contribute to her dignity. They dreaded an exclusive absorption in ecclesiastical interests or in religious occupations and thought that the influence of the church was enhanced by the enlargement of the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>49</sup> Cunningham, op. cit., p. 438.

horizons of the clergy. This group of ministers was in favor of pluralities and resented any ordinance which debarred clergymen from adding parochial charges to other offices.

There were others in the church, however, who resented the intrusion of secular engagements upon the attention of those selected for parochial charges. These clergymen were found primarily within the ranks of the rising Evangelical Party, which made a sharp distinction between the secular and the sacred. They placed particular importance on preaching and pastoral work and believed that too many ministers were devoting their time to history, or philosophy, or other literary pursuits.<sup>50</sup>

These two groups often divided on the question of pluralities and the agitation increased with each respective case that came before the General Assembly.<sup>51</sup> In 1817 the Assembly passed an act declaring that no professor in a university could hold a parish unless it was close to the university seat.<sup>52</sup> Those who opposed pluralities, however, were

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<sup>50</sup> Andrew J. Campbell, Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland, 1707-1929 (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, Ltd., 1930), p. 168.

<sup>51</sup> See Thomson's Review of Dr. George Cook's Address Respecting Residence and Pluralities. E. C. I., Vol. 13, p. 194.

<sup>52</sup> William L. Mathieson, Church and Reform in Scotland, 1797-1843 (Glasgow: Maclehose and Sons, 1912), p. 270.

not satisfied with this measure and resolved that the evil system should be absolutely abolished.

In 1823, the Crown presented to the High Church parish of Glasgow, Principal Duncan Macfarlan of the University of Glasgow. There was much opposition and the Presbytery refused to sustain the presentation. The Synod of Glasgow and Ayr confirmed the decision of the Presbytery and the case came before the General Assembly in 1824. The Assembly reversed the decisions of the Presbytery and Synod, but the question was again brought before the Supreme Court of the Church in 1825.<sup>53</sup> On this occasion Chalmers and Thomson led "a brilliant debate" against pluralities and against this presentation in particular.<sup>54</sup> Hetherington says:

A debate ensued, remarkable for the accurate research into the constitutional history of the Church displayed by some, the grave and lofty views of the sacredness and importance of ministerial duties exhibited by others, and the powerful and thrilling eloquence of Chalmers and Thomson.<sup>55</sup>

Thomson's address on this occasion gives further evidence that he was endowed with the qualities most effective

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<sup>53</sup> "Eighteen overtures on this subject were laid on the table of the General Assembly proving the deep interest with which it was regarded by the community at large." W. M. Heatherington, History of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1848), p. 373.

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Story, The Church History of Scotland, Vol. III, p. 764.

<sup>55</sup> Hetherington, loc. cit.



in debate. His speech was made late in the second day of a long discussion on the subject and he carefully reviewed and criticized much that had gone before.<sup>56</sup> His unique ability for detecting and attacking the weak points in his opponents' arguments was clearly demonstrated.

In the early phase of his address he called attention to the fact that much had been said about personality and admitted that it was difficult in such a discussion to avoid personality.

I disclaim, indeed, all wish and all intention to hurt unnecessarily the feelings of any person, whether he be absent or present. But further than this my disclaimer does not go. I will not allow mere courtesy to spoil my argument in such a case as the one before us, or refrain from speaking freely of persons as well as things, when it is requisite for supporting what I conceive to be the cause of truth.<sup>57</sup>

He made reference to the fact that "a learned gentleman," a member of the Assembly, had spoken highly of his (Thomson's) services as a minister, saying that over and above the discharge of his pastoral duties he might undertake the duties of a professorship. He expressed his gratitude for this observation, but said:

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<sup>56</sup> Thomson's address consisted of 34 printed pages.

<sup>57</sup> Report of the Debate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on the Overtures anent the Union of Offices, May 1825 (Edinburgh: John Lindsay and Co., 1825), p. 149.



. . . I could no more perform what is justly expected of a professor along with my labours as a parish minister, than I could fly to the moon. I speak from experience. I do not see how or when I could have the leisure to teach in a college, as teaching in a college ought to be conducted, and yet be in any tolerable measure faithful to the people committed to my spiritual care.<sup>58</sup>

Thomson was careful but definite in his arguments when the names of other ministers or professors were used; however, he did not hesitate to apply his remarks to them. He was convinced that the offices of the minister and the professor could not be combined successfully, as one man could not fulfill the duties both of a professor and of a minister as he ought.

A clergyman is under an ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and bound by solemn vows to submit to all its injunctions. But when he becomes a professor in a university, he puts himself under another and a different jurisdiction, to whose authority he must be subject in everything to which that authority lawfully extends.<sup>59</sup>

He pointed out that the university jurisdiction may lay upon him the performance of duties at the very time that the ecclesiastical jurisdiction requires his services as a minister of a parish, or as a member of the presbytery. The two authorities would inevitably clash and interfere with each other and the pluralist must of necessity violate his obligations to the one or to the other. He then proceeded to

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<sup>58</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

enumerate some of the occasions of conflict that would possibly arise.<sup>60</sup>

He spoke of the general laws which invested the presbytery with the power of punishing ministers for neglecting their pastoral duties and said it was consistent with these laws that:

A parochial minister shall not be allowed to undertake an office in a university which necessarily disqualifies him for devoting himself, as he ought to do, to the office of the ministry; . . . we naturally propose to enact a law which shall have the effect of putting an end to it in all time coming . . . . And we wish a particular law directed against a practice which may not only be attended with such neglect, but which appears to us to be necessarily productive of it; because a professorship is not a pursuit which the pluralist may take up and lay down at pleasure, but an office, by accepting of which, . . . he places himself under a separate jurisdiction, and becomes bound to discharge a prescribed class of duties, requiring on his part regular portions of his time, and a peculiar devotedness to academical labour and academical studies.<sup>61</sup>

Thomson referred to allusions which had been made to his editorship of the EDINBURGH CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTOR and the operation of the school which he had established in his parish. The arguments which he used to prove that both these activities were in accord with his duties as a minister and pastor were logically set forth and clearly tenable.

He denied that pluralities were agreeable to the spirit and genius of the ecclesiastical constitution,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 152-153.

<sup>61</sup> Loc. cit.

as had been asserted by his opponents. "Gentlemen on the other side," he said, "forget two things":

They forget that the great leading feature of our church discipline is to keep all office-bearers at their post--to prevent them from meddling with what must abstract them from their spiritual cure--to render them efficient as parochial ministers . . . . And they forget that cases which arise out of necessity are no proofs or illustrations of ordinary or essential character; and that those instances of union of offices which formerly occurred almost always originated in the scarcity of individuals qualified to undertake the function of a professorship, who were not at the same time clergymen, and in the principle, certainly wise and considerate, that it was better that the duties of the two situations should be but imperfectly performed, than that the duties of either should not be performed at all.<sup>62</sup>

In presenting his arguments and countering those of his opponents, Thomson gave evidence of his knowledge of the history of pluralities. However, he said that he "did not feel it necessary to enter particularly into the historical argument," as that part of the subject had been most ably and successfully discussed.

Those who were in favor of pluralities had challenged the anti-pluralist advocates to prove that, in the numerous cases where the union of offices had existed, the duties of the offices thus united were not well discharged. In answer to this challenge, Thomson said:

In the cases referred to, the duties might be performed in such a way as to be creditable to the individuals concerned, considering the difficulties they had to

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

struggle with--though even that I cannot admit to have been generally true--but that unquestionably the duties were not performed so well as they could have been performed had the offices been divided; and the church and the country are entitled to have, not what will satisfy a pluralist, but all that the professor and the minister can achieve, in their several departments, according to the talents that God has conferred upon them, and the opportunities of exertion that they enjoy.<sup>63</sup>

Thomson chose to refer to the work of two prominent men of the Moderate Party who had served the church as pluralists, Principal George Hill and Principal William Robertson. He spoke of them both in terms of high admiration and respect. Principal Hill had accomplished much in both his parish and his professorship. His theological lectures were good and should be perused by every divine, but:

If he had directed his united energies to that line of study in which he has proved himself so much qualified to excel . . . we should have had more fruits of his gifted mind to enrich our libraries, and help our young theologians in their career of attainment . . . . I am entitled to infer that the church has suffered by his holding the two offices, ably as, comparatively speaking, he discharged the functions of both.<sup>64</sup>

His words concerning Principal Robertson were similar and he produced a letter written by the Principal in which the writer expressed his wish to resign his pastorate in Edinburgh and apply his whole time to literary pursuits. Principal Robertson was explicit in his acknowledgment that his duties as a parish minister prevented him from giving himself as

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

vigorously as he wished to those literary pursuits in which, as the principal of a university and a man of learning, he was anxious to excel.<sup>65</sup> Thomson applied this evidence with directness and skill and, since Principal Robertson had been one of the greatest leaders of the Moderate Party, he could not have chosen a man whose name would have been more honored by his opponents.

One of the principal arguments set forth by those who favored pluralities was founded on the allegation that, if clergymen are prevented from holding professorships, skeptics and infidels would become teachers in the seats of learning and the universities would in time be overrun with irreligion and the students would be trained in hostility to the Christian faith.

This argument took for granted, Thomson stated, that the Scottish men of science and literature were, to a great extent, unbelievers; that they did not merely hold religious opinions at variance with those which the Clergy maintained, but that they rejected Christianity altogether, and that they had a positive dislike of it and that they would teach others to feel that hostility to the faith by which they themselves were activated. He found it impossible to believe this, even though he granted that there were too many

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

infidels among the learned men of Scotland. "How many of the clergy," he asked, "are careless and undutiful"? There were some, but this was not sufficient grounds for implicating the whole order, and neither could the whole body of literati in Scotland be accused of enmity to religion.<sup>66</sup>

Thomson expressed his great concern for immortal souls but he would not be "deluded and terrified by the mere cry of infidelity, so often raised to serve the purposes of a party, and employed to perpetuate abuses not much less grievous than itself."<sup>67</sup> His argument on this point was particularly appropriate and his logic was clearly tenable. He proceeded to show that the men of science and literature were not wholly unbelievers, and that the patrons of the universities were not as devoid of religious principle and of common honesty as the argument set forth by his opponents would infer. His powers of sarcasm were brought forth as he enumerated many of the professors that had been placed by the patrons, confining himself to those who were members of the Assembly.<sup>68</sup>

The pluralists had suggested that whatever may be made of other professorships, the chair of Divinity could

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 164-168.

<sup>67</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>68</sup> Report of Debate, loc. cit.



very properly be held by a parish minister. In reply, Thomson said that of all the professorships he knew, that of divinity was the one he would select as being most incompatible with a parochial charge. He admitted that necessity arising from want of endowment might force such a union, but such a union was inexpedient and hurtful. There was not a more important class in the university, to the church and to the country, than the one in question. Its duties, if rightly contemplated and faithfully discharged, were more than sufficient for the undistracted attention of any individual whatever. The Professor of Divinity had not merely to deliver a few lectures himself and to hear many discourses from his pupils; but he had to keep up his own knowledge of the science by perusing the numerous publications on its various branches that were continually issuing from the press.

Thomson believed that it was the duty of the Professor of Theology to superintend the conduct of those committed to his care, as their improvement in practical religion was no less important than their acquaintance with Christian doctrine. He should maintain a constant and friendly intercourse with them while they pursued their courses in divinity; and he should correspond with them during the summer months, administering his advice and his aid when these were called for. He was convinced that if the professor did his duty to the students who waited upon his teaching, and to the church



whose future ministers these students were to be, he could have no time remaining for the official duties of a minister of a town parish.<sup>69</sup>

The best security against the appointment of unchristian professors, Thomson believed, was to be found in the faithful and diligent service rendered by the ministers of religion in their own proper sphere. They should exhibit a disinterested love of learning, along with a zealous discharge of pastoral duty. Their actions should be consistent with the honest and lofty spirit of the christian system which they professed to teach. If the clergy were thus distinguished, they would be more frequently consulted in academic appointments than they could ever expect to be when they were pressing for their own personal advancement, and failing to manifest a generous regard for the promotion of literary merit wherever it was to be found.<sup>70</sup>

Thomson's humor and wit drew much laughter from the Assembly; and his sustained and logical reasoning, although sometimes carried to the extreme, contributed greatly to the debate. When the votes were counted, however, the pluralists were victorious by a small margin of 26 votes.

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<sup>69</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

Though, in this matter, the Evangelicals did not win most of the decisions in the General Assembly, their strong impact was felt on the life of the church; and the line of demarcation between Moderates and Evangelicals was growing less and less distinct. Thomson had successfully organized the Evangelical forces, and the leaders in the Moderate Party recognized in him a churchman of genuine ability and sincere regard for the purity of the church.

#### B. THE CHURCHMAN AND EDUCATION

Educational opportunities in Scotland at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century were extremely limited. The number of teachers was by no means adequate and the parish schoolmasters were, as a rule, poorly paid. In 1818, a government investigation was made which brought out the fact that 50,000 children of school age were without instruction because of the lack of accommodation. The situation was worst in the Highlands where "half the population were unable to read."<sup>71</sup>

In 1824, the General Assembly set up an Education Committee to deal with the problem and subscriptions were raised for the establishment of schools, primarily in the

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<sup>71</sup> James Mackinnon, The Social and Industrial History of Scotland (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1921), p. 172.

## Highlands and Islands.<sup>72</sup>

Thomson was an active member of this committee from its establishment until his death. The report of the Education Committee to the General Assembly in 1831 takes particular notice of his work on its behalf and records "the heavy loss" which was sustained by the death of a "most useful and zealous member."<sup>73</sup>

He assisted at the origin of the Assembly's scheme in devising the rules which gave the Committee easy and efficient operation. The report says that he:

. . . advised in every act that was designed to improve the discipline of the schools, and to bring them more closely under the inspection of the committee. He was never willingly absent from its meetings; and found leisure to examine a large proportion of those teachers, who, . . . have come forward as candidates for employment. In a word, to say that Dr. Thomson was a member of this Committee, is to intimate that he cherished its interests and pursued them with ardour and effect; for whatsoever he did, he did it heartily 'as to the Lord and not unto man.' With the same decision that marked his speculative judgments, he withheld no portion of his zeal from any object he had once consented to promote, . . . least of all from a work so pre-eminent as that of education, among the duties of a Christian pastor.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 23, pp. 488-489.

<sup>73</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 30, p. 460.

<sup>74</sup> George Baird, Report of the General Assembly's Committee for Promoting Education and Religious Instruction in the Highlands and Islands, and Throughout Scotland. E. C. I., Vol. 30, p. 464.

Principal George Baird, the Convenor of the Education Committee, says:

In those plans of benevolence that enjoyed the advantage of his co-operation, there was a general leaning on his counsels; his large but practical intelligence; his judgments not less sound than they were prompt. It is believed there were few of such measures that did not feel the benefit of his energy in the extension of their objects; or of his vigilance in maintaining the fidelity of their management.<sup>75</sup>

In the report of the Education Committee, notice was taken of the qualities that sprung more directly from his religion:

. . . his unabating zeal, and that reverence for the immediate duty, which in distinguished men, cements the cooperation of their associates,--his patience in business, and that entire freedom from the pride of talent, which rendered his life so useful and his character so beloved.<sup>76</sup>

In speaking of Thomson, Ramsay MacDonald says: "Like Dr. Chalmers, his ecclesiastical successor, he was keenly interested in social questions . . . . He was one of the pioneers of the modern education movement."<sup>77</sup>

He was concerned because of the great numbers of people all over Scotland who had never had the benefits of even the rudiments of an education. He was especially

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<sup>75</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>76</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>77</sup> Dictionary of National Biography (Sidney Lee, editor, 70 Vols., London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1890), Article on Thomson.

concerned, since he was convinced that the prevailing situation had a direct and unwholesome bearing on the religious and moral state of the people.

The religion of the ignorant . . . is for the most part mere superstition; no matter what the speculative purity, or the practical tendency of their creed, their attachment to it originates rather in fear than in principle, and is directed rather to its forms than to its spirit.<sup>78</sup>

No aspect of life was more painful and distressing to him than that which was exhibited by a crowd of people engrossed with mere sensual cares and passions, and destitute of the habits of reflection and the knowledge of duty. He, therefore, desired to remedy this situation in Scotland through the promotion of parochial schools, under the direction of the clergy.

We certainly wish most earnestly to see parochial schools established through every part of the British Empire; but we much fear, that the benevolent promotion of that measure would have the mortification to find the schools very inefficient, without the co-operation of a resident clergy; and perhaps also a clergy empowered to act together as a body, who would support, stimulate, and check each other.<sup>79</sup>

Thomson was by no means content with the system of religious education for the youth of his own parish, and was disturbed because of the number of people who could not attend or understand his ministrations and whose defective

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<sup>78</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 19, p. 739.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

training, in secular and religious training alike, was inevitable from the lack of means and opportunities. He was convinced that the prevailing situation was the cause of much juvenile delinquency, and insisted that church members and all other citizens interested in the welfare of their country were morally obligated to do everything in their power to remedy the situation. "The education of the child," he said, "determines the character of the man. Even when the details of that education are forgotten, its good effects are permanent and visible."<sup>80</sup>

Through the cooperation of his session and numerous friends, he made plans to establish a parochial school for the benefit of the children residing within his parish. He believed that the success of the school would depend, in a great measure, on strict adherence to the principle of locality, and no children were to be admitted from other parishes. He made it known that the school was to conform to the original spirit and intention of the National Establishment of Parochial Schools; that is, to give the children a religious education. For this purpose their education was to be so conducted as to give religion its paramount importance in their estimation, and to produce the desired effect

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<sup>80</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 28, p. 127.



on their minds and conduct. The children were to be instructed in the truths and precepts of Christianity by means of reading the scriptures as a regular school book, and by learning appropriate catechisms.

We regret that other school books have too much jostled the Bible out of our schools; and we regret still more, what we know to be a certainty, that there are parochial schools in which the Bible is not read at all. We regret all this the more deeply, because we consider that it is by reading the Bible at school, that a general knowledge of the contents of that Sacred Book have been so widely diffused through Scotland; and because we firmly believe, with regard to a great proportion of our population, that if they do not become acquainted with their Bible at school, they will remain ignorant of it through life.<sup>81</sup>

Christianity was to be made, as far as practicable, to pervade all the secular and literary tuition which they were to receive. Thomson felt that if this was done, the students could be safely and beneficially entrusted with a more liberal course of instruction than that which the average child in Scotland enjoyed. He was certain that when all the knowledge they acquired "was guarded by the authority, and sanctified by the influence of the gospel," it would elevate the tone of their dispositions and improve their character. Therefore, they should be exposed to as much knowledge as possible. Strict care was taken, both in the books that were placed in their hands, and in the oral lessons conveyed

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<sup>81</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 19, p. 797.



to them by their teacher, that all the "objects of nature"; all the "events of providence"; and all the "varieties of character" to which their attention was directed, were associated with "sentiments of enlightened piety, and lessons of moral virtue."<sup>82</sup>

It was an essential and indispensable part of the teacher's duty to take charge of the children when they were out of school as well as when they were in school. He was to visit frequently the families from which they came in order to ascertain their dispositions and behavior, to inquire after them when they were sick in order to discover the true causes of their absence from school, and to know how they applied themselves to their tasks in private.

It was the duty of the teacher to know how his pupils spent the sabbath, what company they kept, in what manner they behaved to their parents, and "all the particulars which would enable him to suit his admonitions to the particular temper, habits, and circumstances of the children."<sup>83</sup>

It was Thomson's plan also to provide an evening school for the benefit of the boys who could not attend the school through the day, because of apprenticeships or other causes. The evening school was to be adapted to the age

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<sup>82</sup> Minute Book of St. George's Institution, Vol. 1, p. 4, (Unpublished).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 5

and attainments of the boys. They were to be prepared for the trades and professions which they were to follow by being taught such subjects as: the higher branches of arithmetic, bookkeeping, and elements of mechanics.

The exercise of religion was not to be dispensed with, in the case of the older boys, any more than in the case of the children attending the day school. Their improvement in sacred knowledge and holy sentiment was to be an object of primary consideration. The teacher was to take advantage of every opportunity "of enforcing upon them the principles of Christian faith and Christian practice, as deserving of their high regard."<sup>84</sup>

Thomson had advanced ideas as to the matter of discipline in his school. Punishment was not to be abolished, but the law of kindness was to be principally employed to secure industry, order, and good conduct among the children. Care was to be taken, by method and management, to prevent idleness and other causes of offense; however, if an offense was committed, the teacher's appeal was to be to the good sense and generous feelings of the children rather than to their fears of suffering. In his expressions of displeasure or of commendation, the teacher was to "pay more regard to

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

diligence and proper behavior than to mere cleverness and proficiency."<sup>85</sup>

In Thomson's plan for his school there were to be no free scholars, but the fees were to be moderate and means were to be provided privately to enable the poor to pay for their children. It was his desire that the children should regard one another as equals and that the teacher should not be disposed to favor some above others.

Small libraries were to be connected with the schools, one for the more advanced children of the day school and one for the pupils of the evening school. All the books were to be in consistency with the general plan and character of the school, as a seminary for religious, moral, and literary instruction. A small quarterly contribution was to be taken from all the children and young people who were inclined to take advantage of this part of the institution.

Thomson's efforts on behalf of the school were highly successful and "he had the satisfaction of seeing a great benefit conferred on the whole district of the city surrounding the scene of his labours."<sup>86</sup>

The school, St. George's Institution, was under the management of a president, twelve extraordinary directors,

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> MacLagan, op. cit., p. 18.

eighteen ordinary directors, and a secretary, all of whom were chosen from the subscribers to the school.

The school was begun in 1823, and incorporated as a society with the power to hold stocks. The sum of 2,200 pounds was raised by subscription for the initial financing of the effort, and a building was erected and "everything necessary provided."<sup>87</sup>

By a most laborious personal superintendence, he (Thomson) brought the school into a state of most active operation. It has fully maintained its character and extensive usefulness as an institution in which Dr. Thomson's affections were so deeply interested.<sup>88</sup>

It is a testimony to Dr. Thomson's ability and careful planning that the school continued under its original name until 30 April 1896, when the students and staff were transferred to the "Scotch Education Department."<sup>89</sup>

Thomson's concern for the development of the total personality of the individual led him to a critical examination of the textbooks that were being used in the teaching of young minds. He concluded that they were "very defective" in the field of religious instruction. The books did not altogether overlook this important subject, and he did not object to any particular articles that they contained;

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<sup>87</sup> Minute Book, loc. cit.

<sup>88</sup> MacLagan, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>89</sup> Minute Book, Vol. III, p. 73.

however, he felt that due prominence was not given to the subject of religion. Instead of placing the great matters of religion in a regular systematic manner and showing its harmony and consistency as a whole, a few isolated topics had been selected as sufficient examples of a subject which, to his evangelical mind, all other knowledge was valuable only as it was related to it.<sup>90</sup>

Thomson regarded this as an error which almost excluded Christianity, in the proper sense of the term, from the subjects of elementary instruction. What he desired was not merely that the scriptures be made an essential part in the daily work of the school, but that Christianity should be deemed of such paramount importance that its formal arrangement and exposition in the school books be held as necessary as any other department of knowledge.<sup>91</sup>

He believed that Christianity could not be excluded from any plan of education, because it was from Christianity that man derived the highest motives both for the acquisition of knowledge and the performance of duty.<sup>92</sup>

On the one hand, we are evidently endowed with a capacity of knowledge which ought to be cultivated with the utmost diligence; and, on the other hand, we are as

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<sup>90</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 27, p. 627.

<sup>91</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 631.

evidently endowed with a capacity of religious and moral feeling, for which the improvement and exaltation of which the improvement the most extensive knowledge is to be held as only subservient.<sup>93</sup>

... We would insist that Christianity, not as it is found in the creed of a particular church or an association of Christians, but as it is in the pure scriptures of truth, be acknowledged as the presiding power over every department of knowledge, to whose majesty all must do homage, and all behest they must obey. We cannot, and will not be satisfied with any arrangements which do not embrace this.<sup>94</sup>

Thomson gave a large amount of time and energy to the work of teaching in his school, as well as preparing books of elementary character for the use of his pupils.

He employed himself in writing and compiling school-books, from the simplest forms of arranging the letters of the alphabet, in such a way as to facilitate instruction, on to that of a 'Collection' for the highest class. This 'Collection,' containing many original pieces of the Doctor's own, we have no hesitation in pronouncing to be the best that has appeared; and we cordially recommend it as the highest English class-book for parochial and other schools.<sup>95</sup>

Thomson, himself, said:

Our heart goes along with every pious and judicious attempt, however humble it may be, to promote the welfare of the rising generation. The work of their instruction is of infinite importance to themselves, and to society, to the progress of mankind in useful improvement, and to the interest of the Redeemer's Kingdom throughout the world.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 629.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 630.

<sup>95</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 30, p. 519. (This "Collection" could not be located.)

<sup>96</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 13, p. 111.

## C. THE CHURCHMAN AND CHURCH PSALMODY

Thomson's talents were many and varied and he exercised them all in the service of the church.

Among the many things to which this man of untiring energy gave the benefit of his support was elevating the standard and improving the psalmody of the Scottish Church.<sup>97</sup>

In 1820, he published a collection entitled Sacred Harmony.<sup>98</sup> Thomson, himself, composed many psalm tunes included in the collection, of which the best known are St. George's Edinburgh and Redemption. The first of these tunes is often sung on communion sabbaths in the Church of Scotland to the closing stanzas of the twenty-fourth Psalm, "for the musical rendering of which it was specially composed."<sup>99</sup>

In the preface to his work, Thomson refers to the paucity of meters in the national psalmody; and he expresses his hope that this defect will be speedily remedied by the exertions of the psalmody committee of the Church of Scotland.

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<sup>97</sup> C. G. McCrie, The Public Worship of Presbyterian Scotland (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1892), p. 318.

<sup>98</sup> Andrew Thomson, Sacred Harmony. Part I. For the Use of St. George's Church, Edinburgh. Being a collection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes, with an accompaniment for the Organ or Piano Forte. Edinburgh: 1820.

<sup>99</sup> McCrie, op. cit., p. 319.



The tunes contained in the collection were classified into four groups. The first group was made up of tunes which had been long in common use and were held in high esteem by the people. The next group consisted of airs which had failed to find their way into general use, although entitled to recognition. Then there followed some tunes of a more modern date, including some culled from the works of the great masters. The final group contained tunes which had never before been published, with the greater number having been composed especially for this work. Thomson's collection contained 178 tunes adapted to the psalms, paraphrases, and hymns in the enlarged psalmody of that date; music for five sanctuses; one dismissal; and two anthems.<sup>100</sup> Thirteen of the tunes in the collection were composed by Thomson.

He insisted on high efficiency in the singing at his own church. In a letter to the members of his congregation, he reminded them that the primary thing to be attended to in every part of worship was the devotion of the heart; and asserted that "nothing is inconsistent between real devotion and good music."<sup>101</sup> It was evident to him that these two

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 318-319.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Thomson, Letter To The Members of The Congregation in St. George's Church. (Unpublished Manuscript in Edinburgh Room, Edinburgh Public Library). Jan. 18, 1831.

things were not only compatible but possessed a mutual affinity and tended to improve one another.

He believed that if music was to be employed at all in worship it should be of the very best kind that could be procured, and should be performed in the very best manner.

To have music of the highest excellence is more suitable to the nature of religious worship,-- more respectful to the Being who is being worshipped, -- more calculated to soothe and elevate and improve the mind of the worshippers, -- more agreeable in every respect, to the objects in view, and to the properties of the case.<sup>102</sup>

He was aware of the fact that music may be good and yet be very improper for use in a church.

It may be too intricate and too difficult; it may be too abundantly simple and easy; be unsuitable in its character; or it may be so conducted as to draw away the attention from those things to which it is only a vehicle or an accompaniment.<sup>103</sup>

When he spoke of the "best music," he meant the music which was best adapted to the sacred purposes and to congregational use. Such music, he said:

consists of the most flowing and expressive melodies, clothed in the most correct and efficient harmony--and which is executed in such a way as to render the greatest assistance that can be derived from such an auxiliary to the devotional exercises of the people.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>103</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>104</sup> Loc. cit.

In order to have his high ideals for church music accepted in his own church and in the Church of Scotland at large, Thomson knew that many deeply ingrained prejudices would have to be overcome. He called upon his own congregation to consent to considerable changes in their psalmody, and "to admit of certain things which look like innovations."<sup>105</sup>

Surely nothing is good merely because it is old: and it is somewhat strange, that while everything else is making progress, the musical department of our worship, so susceptible to improvement, and so evidently requiring it, should be neglected by the most enlightened Christians, and either allowed to remain stationary or suffered to degenerate.<sup>106</sup>

Thomson suggested certain propositions to his people and asked for their cooperation in putting them into effect. He first asserted that a well trained choir was helpful for congregational worship and praised his own choir by saying that "most commendable diligence has been employed both by their teacher and by themselves . . . and it is gratifying to observe the proficiency they have made."<sup>107</sup> He alluded to the expense involved in supporting a choir and expressed his gratitude to his congregation for their contributions, and his confidence that their liberality would not fail. Subscription books for this purpose were kept, and he

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<sup>105</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>106</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>107</sup> Loc. cit.

encouraged his people to give "according to their own views and feelings."<sup>108</sup>

He felt it "improper to have such tunes sung by the choir on ordinary occasions as are not known, or as are unacceptable to the people" and confined the psalmody in St. George's to one book, which was published by his precentor, Robert Smith.<sup>109</sup>

He was anxious that the congregation join heartily in the singing and impressed on them the fact that it was the duty of Christian worshippers, insofar as they were gifted with the talent, to exercise it. "If you content yourselves with listening to others, that you may enjoy the harmony; this looks as if you came to the house of God, not to worship your Maker, but to get entertainment for yourselves."<sup>110</sup>

Millar Patrick, in his Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody, draws attention to the insufficiencies of the Scottish Psalter in the early years of the Nineteenth Century, and of the pressure that was brought to bear upon the General Assembly for an improved and revised psalter.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>109</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>110</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>111</sup> Millar Patrick, Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 212.

Thomson was keenly aware of the need and says:

It must be obvious to every competent judge, that a great deal of the music which has been long practiced in the Church of Scotland, is exceedingly dull in itself, and that even the most unexceptionable portions of it are got up and executed in a very tasteless, inaccurate, and offensive manner. It contains some very beautiful, solemn and appropriate strains; but on the whole, it has such a spiritless and monotonous character, as to be wholly undeserving of that attachment which is felt for it, and that praise which is bestowed upon it, even by individuals of superior discernment.<sup>112</sup>

He pleaded for a substitution of better music and at the same time praised such tunes as Old Hundred, St. David's, and Dundee. He liked the "exquisite airs" of Haydn and Mozart and desired to see them adapted for use in the Church.

He called upon his people to be diligent in the preparation for the worship of praise:

The psalmody constitutes an important and delightful part of worship; and you not only forgo much of the edification and enjoyment which it is calculated to afford but fail in that reverence which is due to Him whose praises you are called on to sing, when you are careless about the mode in which this part of your devotions is performed, or when you will not use the means which you possess, for giving it the very highest character of excellence of which it is susceptible.<sup>113</sup>

The existence of a choir was to guide and assist in the vocal efforts of the congregation, and not to be a pretext for not singing. He entreated his congregation to endeavor to sing in "harmony" the "parts" of the tunes

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<sup>112</sup> Thomson, Letter, Loc. cit.

<sup>113</sup> Loc. cit.

that were best suited to their general voices. He suggested the propriety of learning the psalm tunes and of practicing at home, and had tickets placed in the vestibule of the church intimating the tunes that were to be sung on the coming Sunday. Congregational practice was to be held in the church for one hour each Saturday and he urged the members to make a special effort to be present.<sup>114</sup>

Thomson was fortunate in securing Robert Smith, of Paisley, as his precentor. Smith was the able precentor of the Abbey Church of Paisley and, at the insistence of Thomson, came to Edinburgh in 1823. He was "a voluminous composer and compiler" and cooperated with the energetic and musical pastor of St. George's "in bringing about a marked improvement in the psalmody, not only of the congregation with which he was specially associated, but of the country generally."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>115</sup> McCrie, op. cit., p. 319.

## CHAPTER III

### THE EDITOR

#### THE EDINBURGH CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTOR

When Andrew Thomson was moved to the New Greyfriars Church in Edinburgh in the Spring of 1810, the most active and public phase of his career began. Soon after he had settled in the cultural metropolis of Scotland he founded a monthly periodical which he appropriately named the Edinburgh Christian Instructor.<sup>1</sup> In the establishment of this ecclesiastical periodical he had the help of a few like-minded friends, the most notable being Thomas McCrie, but it was conducted and edited by Thomson from its commencement until his death in 1831.

This was an ambitious undertaking for Thomson, as the idea was entirely new in the Church of Scotland. The power of the press in religious and ecclesiastical matters was not known in Scotland.<sup>2</sup> The magazine speedily acquired great

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<sup>1</sup> The first issue of the magazine appeared in August, 1810. It was published in Edinburgh by William Whyte and Co., and sold for one shilling and six pence per copy. Each issue contained about seventy-five printed pages. It was popular from the beginning and was sold in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Greenock, Dumfries, Perth, Stirling, Aberdeen, Paisley, Inverness, Kirkaldy, Newcastle, Liverpool, Birmingham, London, and Dublin.

<sup>2</sup> R. M. W. Cowan, The Newspaper in Scotland (Glasgow: George Outram and Co., 1946), p. 105.



influence and "contributed largely to the promulgation of the popular principles, which gradually acquired the ascendancy in the Church."<sup>3</sup> Cunningham says that "it did for the liberal party in the Church what the Edinburgh Review was at the same period doing for the liberal party in the State."<sup>4</sup>

In his book, Scotland's Battles for Spiritual Independence, MacPherson says:

Dr. Thomson's labours in the cause of religious literature should not be forgotten. The Christian Instructor, which he established, has been claimed to do for the Evangelical movement at that day what the Tracts for the Times did for the Oxford Movement. The Christian Instructor became the literary center round which the new spirit of religious democracy rallied.<sup>5</sup>

William Taylor has this to say:

He (Thomson) believed in the utilization of the press as well as of the pulpit, and through the pages of the Christian Instructor . . . he did much to mold the religious opinion of his time, and to secure the ultimate triumph of the Evangelical Party in the Scottish Church.<sup>6</sup>

It was Thomson's purpose that the magazine should be a strong and important instrument in communicating and

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<sup>3</sup> T. V. W. Niven, The Church of Scotland: from Revolution to Present, Robert Herbert Story, editor, The Church of Scotland Past and Present. Vol. III, p. 761.

<sup>4</sup> John Cunningham, The Church History of Scotland (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1882), Vol. II, p. 436.

<sup>5</sup> Hector MacPherson, Scotland's Battles for Spiritual Independence (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1905), p. 108.

<sup>6</sup> William M. Taylor, The Scottish Pulpit from the Reformation to the Present Day (London: Charles Burnet & Co., 1887), p.173.

defending divine truth, as it was interpreted by the Evangelicals, and in maintaining purity of doctrine and discipline. It was to watch over the moral tendencies of the literature of the time and encourage every effort for promoting the paramount cause of righteousness and truth. "Whatever," said Thomson, "directly or indirectly affects morals or religion, comes within our province."<sup>7</sup> Writing of his magazine in 1813, he said;

We began it with a humble but sincere view, to promote what we believe to be sound and genuine Christianity. In our progress, we have studied to keep this important purpose uniformly in view. And when we abandon the great cause which we have espoused, for any inferior or sinister consideration, from that moment may everyone of our friends forsake us, and may the Instructor be left without a single admirer, and without a single reader!<sup>8</sup>

He planned that the Christian Instructor should be a magazine of religious communications, reviews of books, literary and scientific intelligence, ecclesiastical information, and missionary records.

The magazine was a success from its very beginning, primarily because of the great mental and physical energies of its editor, but also because of the excellence of the

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew M. Thomson, editor, The Edinburgh Christian Instructor (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1810-1831), Vol. 1, p. 49. [Hereinafter known as the E. C. I.]

<sup>8</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 6, p. 65.

contributions made to it by the most capable of the Evangelical clergymen of Scotland. Among those who contributed many excellent articles to its pages were Thomas Chalmers, Thomas McCrie, Robert Burns of Paisley, Henry Grey, and William Thomson. Andrew Thomson's contribution to his magazine was adequately summed up in the announcement of his death.

What he did for the Instructor by his correspondence and other exertions, and how much he contributed by his personal compositions, to its character and success, during the whole of these twenty years, it is impossible for even the Proprietors to say, so incessant were his labours, and so prompt and rapidly could he commit to writing the conceptions of his luminous, powerful and ever-active mind. His heart was in the work; it was the object of his daily and hourly solicitude; and many an almost sleepless night did he pass . . . to the shortening of his invaluable life, in preparing it for coming forth to the public, as no unworthy exhibition of his own talents, and those of his correspondents; and above all, as the vehicle of able instruction and suitable reproof, on the various topics which its pages embraced.<sup>9</sup>

Thomson infused into his magazine his buoyant energy and burning enthusiasm and it played a conspicuous part in securing for his party, then in the weakness of comparative infancy, a power and prestige that issued in its final triumph. The Instructor gave scope to his "rare controversial powers"<sup>10</sup> and "through it the thoughts and reasonings

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<sup>9</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 30, p. 879.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Brown, Church and State in Scotland (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1891), p. 207.

of his powerful mind were communicated to the public, like successive shocks of electricity, stirring the heart of the kingdom from its torpid lethargy, and spreading dismay among the discomfited antagonists."<sup>11</sup> He took advantage of every opportunity to bring the church back towards the old paths, so well defined in her constitution and so brightly traced in her history.

He spared no effort in attempting to make his magazine worthy of the name he had given it and required excellence in form and content of the articles and reviews that filled its pages. He felt that Christian instruction embraced a wide and extensive range and, if such instruction was to be effective, it must be presented in a clear and intelligible manner. He felt that there was no phase of life and learning that did not come under the head of Christian instruction.

True religion is assuredly the most effectual civilizer of the species, and most favorable to the cultivation of the intellectual as well as the moral powers, raising the mind from the grossness of sense, from the meanness of low and vulgar pursuits, and producing the noblest expansion of the faculties. It involves the intellect and the taste, while it purifies the heart, and ameliorates the conduct.<sup>12</sup>

The content of the Instructor was well organized and,

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<sup>11</sup> Robert F. Burns, Life and Times of Rev. Robert Burns, D.D. Toronto: James Campbell and Sons, 1871), p. 113.

<sup>12</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 8, p. 392.

since the form remained unchanged during Thomson's lifetime, it evidently proved satisfactory to the proprietors of the magazine and to the large number of readers throughout Scotland and Northern England.

The magazine was divided into four major sections and three minor ones. The first of these sections was entitled Religious Communications and was considered as the miscellaneous department. This was an important division and imparted to the Instructor its distinctive character. In this department every topic that was considered worthy of notice had its due portion of attention bestowed upon it and was exhibited in its various aspects and bearings, according to the unavoidably varying views of different contributors.

There was no limit to the range of this department. Contributors were invited to furnish short papers on any subject that appeared to involve matters of interest or utility. Doubts and difficulties that occurred to one mind were treated and perhaps removed by another. Error, from the Evangelical point of view, was detected and exposed and the truth established. In this connection, the attention of correspondents was particularly turned to biblical criticism.

A "practical sermon" was inserted in this section, which was usually well written and sought to apply some single scriptural injunction to life.

An examination of the contents of the section on Religious Communications in the issue for July, 1821, reveals something of the variety of the subjects that were discussed. The first article addressed to the editor is On the Moderatorship of the General Assembly. The second article is entitled Remarks on the Doctrine of Election, and covers some eight finely printed pages. The next article contains some Remarks, Critical and Explanatory, on the Epistle to the Romans and is followed by a contribution which the author entitles Historical Notices of the Acts of the Apostles. The two succeeding articles are entitled: Observations on the Genealogy of Christ, as recorded by the Evangelist Matthew and Gospel Comfort to Gospel Mourners; a few Thoughts on I Thess. iv. 13, 14. A letter to the editor follows, recommending that more attention be given to church music, and the final article in the section contains some remarks on Sabbath Schools.<sup>13</sup>

The second major section into which Thomson divided his magazine was the section on Reviews. In this department effort was made to produce talented as well as instructive articles. The work of reviewing new publications was chiefly carried on by Thomson himself, but he was ably assisted by Thomas McCrie. This was an important department and Thomson sought to give it due prominence in his work. In

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<sup>13</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 20.



presenting his reviews to the public, Thomson also presented his decided opinions on most of the issues that concerned the Church. The keen powers of his mind were brought into play and the full force of his strong evangelical convictions was felt on almost every page.

He expressed the object of his reviews in these words:

The practice of reviewing may be regarded as designed, either to award due praise or blame to an author, or to guide the public in forming an estimate of some new book that has appeared, -- or to give such an outline of the contents of a work, and extract such valuable passages as may serve instead of purchasing to such as cannot afford to do so.<sup>14</sup>

Thomson reviewed works of almost every description if they bore even the remotest relation to religion and the Church. Most of his reviews, however, were concerned with books that treated directly with theological subjects or were volumes of sermons. His wide range of knowledge, his keen powers of analysis, and the logical processes of his mind, produced in almost everything he wrote a sense of finality and soundness, as far as evangelical opinion was concerned.

He was thorough in his reviews and honest, often to the point of bluntness. He was generous in giving commendation and praise when he felt it was due, but he was ever ready to condemn and censure when he felt that truth and

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<sup>14</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 27, p. 495.



freedom were being abused, even if the violator was his best friend. On one occasion, when reviewing a sermon by his close friend, Thomas Chalmers, he wrote:

. . . it is to us a most painful and mortifying consideration, that such a preacher as Dr. Chalmers should have given to the world . . . a production so replete with erroneous statement, and so much calculated to level and confound the most important distinctions in Christian doctrine. Such are our sentiments on this occasion, that we should have gladly allowed the discourse to pass unnoticed, could we have done it with a good conscience. But . . . we think it due to our reformed faith and to our Presbyterian Church, that we should point out its defects . . . .<sup>15</sup>

It was his desire "to speak very plainly and to be very earnest" and he felt himself justified, and called upon in any point of duty, to be severe when the occasion demanded it.<sup>16</sup>

We would not intentionally hurt the feelings of anyone, or mar the success of his literary speculations, yet it must not be forgotten, that he who writes, subjects himself to the criticism of the public, and that when books are so extremely dear, a distinction ought to be made for the sake of the buyer, between those who write well and those who do not.<sup>17</sup>

In reviewing a pamphlet directed against the work of the Bible Societies he exemplifies his moral courage and severity:

This pamphlet is contemptible as a piece of literary composition; in a theological point of view it is utterly

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<sup>15</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 17, p. 113.

<sup>16</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 20, p. 338.

<sup>17</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 1, p. 244.

destitute of merit; as a controversial production, it contains nothing which deserves a serious reply; it is without wit, without fancy, without elegance, and without argument. And yet we think it worthy of being noticed. It shows . . . how far gone the opponents of the Bible Society are in weakness and absurdity.<sup>18</sup>

At the conclusion of one review in which he had been particularly severe, he said:

We regret that we have been obliged to speak of it with any degree of severity, but the interests of sacred truth required that we should be more than ordinarily honest in our critical judgment. Amicus Plato, sed magis amica VERITAS!<sup>19</sup>

The occasions which Thomson finds to offer praise, and to express his appreciation for a work well done, far exceed the times when he feels he must be harsh and severe with an author. In reviewing a series of discourses by Chalmers, he says:

We esteem it so excellent as to deserve universal perusal. And we are confident that none can read it . . . without feeling increased respect for the talent and piety of the author, and without being greatly profited by his instructions, as well as being pleased by his manner of imparting them.<sup>20</sup>

Speaking of another writer, Thomson says that "he writes with the simplicity and honest warmth of a man who is in earnest, and with a degree of boldness highly creditable

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<sup>18</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 16, p. 327.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>20</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 20, p. 40.

It has been our misfortune to be frequently accused of undue severity in our criticisms . . . but bad essays we think dangerous, and bad sermons much more so . . . . Towards bad sermons we feel somewhat of the same kind of indignation, which regular medical practitioners entertain towards quack medicines. We consider them as gross impositions on the public . . . . All spiritual quack doctors, therefore, we are determined to expose: their drugs or mischievous compounds, we shall carefully examine and analyze; and, as far as our influence extends, we shall guard the public against further imposition and greater injury.<sup>25</sup>

The next section into which Thomson divided the Instructor was the section on Religious Intelligence. In this department, care was taken that items of importance in the various branches and societies of Christian philanthropy were suitably recorded. The editor was anxious to keep his readers well informed on the activities of the church at large and especially on the missionary work of the church.

At this period in Scotland numerous societies were organized for the religious, economic, and cultural improvement of the people. Associations and societies were organized for promoting Christianity among peoples all over the world. "It was the age of Societies for all kinds of good objects, for the circulation of the Scriptures and of Tracts, for the education of the less favored parts of the land, and for benevolent purposes of every description."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 3, p. 184.

<sup>26</sup> John McLeod, Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since the Reformation (Edinburgh: The Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1943), p. 256.

Through the Instructor, Thomson encouraged the growth of these philanthropic societies by giving them his unqualified support and publicity.

The fourth and last major division of the Instructor was the section entitled: Literary and Scientific Intelligence. The activities and discoveries in almost every field of important research were reported here, though the reports were usually very brief and pointed. This was an interesting department and indicates that Thomson intended his magazine to be a family paper.

The minor sections of the Instructor presented a list of the works in preparation for publication, a list of new publications--both religious and miscellaneous, an ecclesiastical obituary report, and a list of church preferments and ordinations. Information was also given regarding charity sermons that were preached in Edinburgh and the amount of money collected.

The influence of the Instructor as a powerful organ of the Evangelical Party was clearly demonstrated in the Assembly of 1820. Dr. James Bryce, a missionary to Calcutta, India, placed an overture before the General Assembly respecting certain "calumnious passages" that had appeared in

a number of the Instructor.<sup>27</sup> He considered the passage in question as of a "libellous and calumnious nature,"<sup>28</sup> and one that lowered the character of the Assembly in the estimation of the public. He was suspicious of the motives behind the statements of the Christian Instructor and felt that no one could read the paragraph in question and not condemn it. He believed that no statement given by the majority in the Assembly deserved the judgment passed on it by the Instructor. He had heard it represented to be beneath the dignity of the Assembly to notice a periodical publication, but he did not consider that this could hold true with regard to "a work which had so great an influence on public opinion." The Christian Instructor was not an "ephemeral or ordinary publication"; it was "a religious work in which many subjects were ably and properly expounded."

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<sup>27</sup> The following are the strictures which were the subject of the overture: "If we were not speaking of the venerable Assembly, we should certainly denounce such a measure as iniquitous, cruel, and tyrannical in the extreme. As to the drivellers who supported it by their votes, we think them vastly silly, and not a little malignant; but as to those who conceived and proposed it, we have not words to express the terror that we should feel if they were invested with that power in the state which they have most unaccountably acquired in the church. Of those who will sit in the capacity of judges, and after spending a day in prayer to the God of righteousness for light and direction, deliberately and coolly condemn any man, or body of men, who have not been permitted to appear in their own behalf -- we will venture to say that there is no injustice and no mischief of which they are not capable." E. C. I., Vol. 19, p. 406.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 407.

He called upon the Assembly to use its authority to prevent such insults as had been passed on it.<sup>29</sup>

Dr. John Ingles, one of the Moderate leaders, thought it best that the Assembly consider this overture in every respect, but that it should give no support to it and take no official notice of the strictures of the magazine.<sup>30</sup> Dr. Nicol, another leader of the Moderates, believed that the passage in question was "highly offensive, illiberal, and unjust," and moved that the matter be remitted to the Procurator who would inquire what legal means could be taken in this case.<sup>31</sup>

Another motion was proposed, by Dr. Brown of Langton, stating that the Assembly "find that the said expressions are . . . highly exceptionable and indecorous . . . most injurious and disrespectful" and "express their marked disapprobation of language so improperly applied to a decision of the supreme judicatory of the church," but that the General Assembly "do not find this overture the ground of procedure, and therefore dismiss the same."<sup>32</sup>

Many members of the Assembly expressed varied opinions, but all believed that it was most unfortunate that

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 409.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 410-411.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 411-412.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 415.



the Instructor had used such strong language.<sup>33</sup>

Thomson finally addressed the Assembly on this matter and observed that if they gave the case over to the Procurator, as was proposed in Dr. Nicol's motion, they were proceeding upon grounds that were not tenable.<sup>34</sup> They were putting it in the power of the Procurator to dissipate all the funds of the Church, after it had been shown by a previous speaker that any process at law was attended with numerous and insurmountable difficulties. He did not approve of either of the motions, as he thought that both were much stronger than the circumstances of the case called for. He did not attempt to vindicate the language of the Instructor, but held it to be "grossly improper and quite unjustifiable." He was, however, prepared to show that the sentence which they were asked to pronounce upon it was quite disproportionate to its demerit, and that this was not a sincere attempt to maintain the honor and respectability of the Church and of the Assembly.

Thomson complained that the overture made a general charge against the Christian Instructor, which was substantiated by only one paragraph in one number of a work that consisted of nineteen volumes. He proceeded to show that this

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 415-427.

<sup>34</sup> Loc. cit.



was most unfair as the publication had always been favorable to the cause of Christianity and of the Church. He pointed out that it was the only periodical work in Britain which was conducted on the principles, and in support of, the establishment. He directed the attention of the Assembly to numerous instances in which severe language from other sources had been used against other Assemblies and no notice taken of it.<sup>35</sup>

Thomson's words in defending the Instructor were forceful and direct and interspersed with his characteristic humorous anecdotes.

When the votes were cast, Dr. Nicol's motion -- containing the resolutions condemnatory of the Instructor -- was carried by a majority of one, but no ulterior measures were taken. Dr. Robert Burns says:

Dr. Bryce and his conferees found no reason to desire a repetition of such victories. Rising Evangelicalism, and aroused public sentiment, could not be trifled with, and the great guns from St. George's, Edinburgh, kept booming as before.<sup>36</sup>

In the number of the Christian Instructor for July, 1820, lengthy remarks were given on the proceedings of this General Assembly. Regret was expressed for any undue

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 429-430.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Burns, Memoir of the Rev. Stevenson MacGill, D.D. (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1842), p. 114.

offense given to the Assembly by the magazine:

If any language escaped from our pen unworthy of us to employ, and disrespectful to our national church we cordially regret it. We shall endeavor to avoid it in our future observations. We are thankful for the good lesson which has been read to us so publicly and kindly on the subject.<sup>37</sup>

The magazine, however, had no intention of yielding its right to criticize and to censure when such measures were deemed necessary. It professed its "most cordial regard" for the ecclesiastical establishment and its determination to fight the "ruinous measures of Moderation."<sup>38</sup>

Thomson assured the readers of the Christian Instructor that the magazine had not suffered because of the resolutions that had been passed against it. He said:

The censure of the last Assembly has done more for our work than the eulogium of a hundred friends could have done. It has not merely given us tenfold more publicity than we have ever enjoyed before, but has attached to our labours such a degree of importance as cannot fail to prove highly beneficial.<sup>39</sup>

Though the magazine suffered a severe blow in the untimely death of its founder and editor, it was carried on by

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<sup>37</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 19, p. 483.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 501.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 505. One writer says: "The Instructor enjoyed the storm. If they (Moderates) wanted battle, they should have it . . . month after month the Instructor lashed them. Assembly after Assembly it kept them in fear. The Evangelical Party gathered courage as their champion dealt his telling blows." Dr. Cunningham's Life, p. 30. (See Burns, op. cit., p. 114).

his colleagues until 1840. The Edinburgh Christian Instructor was a monument to Thomson's abilities and energies, and through it he helped prepare the people of Scotland for a renewed experience of Evangelical Christianity.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROTAGONIST

#### A. BIBLE SOCIETY -- APOCRYPHA CONTROVERSY

Thomson took a benevolent interest in all the religious and public institutions of the country which had for their object the alleviation of the temporal wants or the spiritual miseries of mankind. He was ever ready at the call of the public, either to act as a director of its various societies, or to plead their cause from the pulpit and in the pages of his magazine.

Co-operation on his part with all that was benevolent and useful, was rendered with a cordiality and a cheerfulness that put the idea of obligation out of sight; and invited new and increasing demands on his leisure and attention.<sup>1</sup>

He was keenly interested in the good work that was being done by the British and Foreign Bible Society and served as a secretary of the Edinburgh branch of that society for many years. He entered warmly into its views and regarded its institution as an era in the history of the Church of Christ. He saw in it a powerful instrument of enlightened philanthropy and fought its battles when it was struggling

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew M. Thomson, editor, The Edinburgh Christian Instructor (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1810-1831), Vol. 1, p. 20. [Hereinafter known as the E. C. I.]

for existence against the calumnies and attacks of mistaken and narrow-minded zeal.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking of the society just six years after it had been established, Thomson said:

With emotions of honest enthusiasm, which we are unable to suppress, and unwilling to controul, we contemplate this noble design; and when we connect the pure and benevolent principles in which it appears to have originated, with the various and permanent blessings of which it may be productive to mankind, we rejoice that we have lived to witness its formation, and, by our humble labours, to promote its success . . . we regard the existence of this society, and the principles on which it is formed, to be a most striking proof, and a most pleasing and auspicious specimen, of the moral improvement of the age.<sup>3</sup>

The society was formed in 1804 and by 1827 it had issued the Word of God in one hundred and forty three different languages.<sup>4</sup> The work was carried on with great energy and enterprize and the Bible-loving people of Scotland contributed a considerable share to this worthy undertaking.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 117; E. C. I., Vol. 11, pp. 182, 322.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> Henry F. Henderson, The Religious Controversies of Scotland (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1905), p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> It was said that in the room in which David Hume died, the Bible Society of Scotland was afterwards constituted, and held its first meeting. James Grant, Old and New Edinburgh (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin, 1882), Vol. ii, p. 160.

Between the years 1821 and 1826, an acute crisis arose in the history of this prosperous organization. It was discovered, much to the dismay of the confiding friends of the society, that the Apocrypha was being bound with the Bible and was being circulated in certain parts of Europe.<sup>6</sup> The British and Foreign Bible Society was started in a Protestant country for printing and circulating the Holy Scriptures "without note or comment" and it was never the intention of the promoters to include the Apocrypha.<sup>7</sup> One of its founders, the Rev. John Pratt, says:

That society was formed -- we speak advisedly of our own knowledge -- on the principle of the utter exclusion of the Apocrypha . . . . We have no reason to believe that a single native of the British Islands had any other intention than to disperse the inspired Word of God, and that only, throughout the world.<sup>8</sup>

The act of circulating the Apocrypha along with the Holy Scriptures aroused a storm of protest, particularly in Scotland. It was felt that in placing the Apocrypha on the same level as the Scriptures, the Committee of London was

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Haldane, Vice President of the Edinburgh Bible Society, made the discovery that the Apocrypha was being circulated with the Bible in August, 1821, when he returned to the offices of the London Society to get a forgotten umbrella. Alexander Haldane, Lives of Robert and James Haldane, 8th Edition (Edinburgh: Wm. P. Kennedy, 1871), p. 483.

<sup>7</sup> Henderson, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> Haldane, op. cit., p. 483.

virtually reducing the Scriptures to the same level as the Apocrypha.

The British and Foreign Bible Society had acted under the impression that it would be vain to attempt to introduce the Word of God into communities where it was most desirable to carry it, without the inclusion of the Apocrypha. Such communities were the Greek Church; Roman Catholic communities, where the Apocrypha was revered and sanctioned by the Council of Trent; Lutheran communities, where the decree of Trent was not accepted, but where the Apocrypha was revered and allowed a secondary degree of inspiration and authority; and certain Reformed Churches of the Continent, where the Apocrypha was regarded as useful for edification.<sup>9</sup>

This policy appeared to the Evangelical leaders of the Edinburgh Bible Society to be very degrading and compromising, and a controversy arose on the subject which soon became a contest between expediency and principle. Robert Haldane, a strong supporter of the Bible Society, was the first to voice vigorous disapproval of this action, but foremost among the opponents of such a policy was the minister of St. George's, Edinburgh. Dr. Robert Burns asserts that:

He drove home to the mind of the Protestant world the conviction that the Bible must be purified from remaining taint. It ought to have been accomplished

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<sup>9</sup> Henderson, op. cit., p. 97.



by Luther; its accomplishment will preserve forever the name of Andrew Thomson.<sup>10</sup>

Hetherington says:

In this controversy Dr. Andrew Thomson stood forth as the fearless and mighty champion of sacred truth, not quite alone, but first without a second, discomfiting every antagonist that dared the encounter. His exertions were perfectly marvelous for several successive years; and were a fair estimate made, they would prove to be equal, if not superior, to those made by any man in any department of mental labour within as short a time.<sup>11</sup>

To Thomson, and many other friends of the institution, the Bible Society had so long been identified with the high purpose of circulating the Scriptures that the idea of abandoning it seemed fraught with hazard to the best interests and hopes of Christianity. They attempted, therefore, quietly at first, to persuade the London Society to circulate nothing but the Holy Scriptures "without note or comment," but their ideas did not prevail.

In May, 1825, the Committee of the Edinburgh Society sent a statement to the London Society in which certain facts regarding the circulating of the Apocrypha, both directly and indirectly, were reviewed and condemned.<sup>12</sup> A plea

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Burns, Memoir of the Rev. Stevenson MacGill, D.D. (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1842), p. 126.

<sup>11</sup> W. M. Hetherington, History of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1848), pp. 376-377.

<sup>12</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 24, pp. 360-366.

was made to the parent society to have nothing to do with the circulating of the Apocryphal writings in any form. This statement contained an appendix in which the "corruptions of the Apocryphal books" were set forth.

This statement was answered by the London Committee in November 1825, who said, in effect, that they would circulate nothing but the Canonical books of scripture.<sup>13</sup> The minutes of the Edinburgh Bible Society of the 12th December 1825, express dissatisfaction with this reply because grants of money would still be made to Continental Societies which were in the practice of circulating the Apocrypha along with the Canonical books.<sup>14</sup> The Edinburgh Committee held that "grants of money or books should be given only to those societies which profess to circulate the inspired books, and the inspired books alone."<sup>15</sup> They believed that the members of the London Committee were "breaking faith with their subscribers, who entrusted them with such ample means for the circulation of the Holy Scriptures."<sup>16</sup>

Thomson was keenly aware of the issues involved in such a dispute and opened the pages of the Instructor to the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 839.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 840.

<sup>15</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Loc. cit.

controversy. Professor Herbert Story says:

Dr. Thomson threw himself into the dispute with his accustomed energy. All his stores of humor, and all his powers of sarcasm, were brought into the requisition. The articles in the Instructor were full of manly reasoning, often, too, of pungent satire.<sup>17</sup>

Watson, the writer of his Memoir, has this to say concerning Thomson's activity in this controversy:

With his characteristic energy, he enlisted himself on the side of what he conceived, and rightly conceived, to be cause of both God and man; and summoning the resources of his powerful mind to the task, he devoted many of the days and nights of the latter years of his life in following the misjudging adherents of the British and Foreign Bible Society, through the maze of misrepresentation and sophistry, into which their shortsighted policy or obsequious predilections had plunged them.<sup>18</sup>

After much discussion, the Edinburgh Committee felt it necessary to take decisive action, and it was laid on Thomson to draw up a statement setting forth the Committee's convictions. This work was afterwards known as the

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<sup>17</sup> Herbert Story, History of the Church of Scotland, Vol. III, p. 768.

In this controversy "the usually tolerant Scots Times was as convinced as Thomson and the Christian Instructor that the British and Foreign Bible Society was 'poisoning the word of inspiration,' and it deplored the fact that 'so many of the religious public in Scotland should still countenance and support this institution.'" R. M. W. Cowan: The Newspapers in Scotland (Glasgow: George Outram and Co., Ltd., 1946), pp. 108-109.

<sup>18</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 1, p. 20.

"Second Statement."<sup>19</sup> It was a thorough and well written document, setting forth the views of the Edinburgh Committee on all matters relating to the circulation of the Holy Scriptures by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Viewed as a piece of sustained reasoning, it will endure as a monument of talents which were sufficient to have placed the author in the first ranks of debators in the most august assembly in the world, whilst it also contains occasional bursts of majestic eloquence rising out of the argument, combined with all the native simplicity which imprinted on his manly brow the stamp of intellectual aristocracy.<sup>20</sup>

In one hundred and fifty one printed pages, Thomson set forth six distinct propositions, each of which he logically and elaborately attempts to prove. The first proposition was that "the object of the British and Foreign Bible Society is to circulate, solely and exclusively, the Word of God."<sup>21</sup> He sought to prove this proposition from documentary evidence and attempted to prove that the Apocrypha was justly and necessarily excluded by the Law of the Society.

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<sup>19</sup> Second Statement of the Committee of the Edinburgh Bible Society, Relative to the Circulation of the Apocrypha by the Committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society. (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1829).

In a letter from Mr. William Cousins to Miss Jean L. Watson, the writer says: "this document had been gone over and revised most carefully by Dr. Gordon, Dr. John Lee, Dr. Paxton, Dr. Peddie, and others equally calm and equally venerable."

<sup>20</sup> Haldane, op. cit., p. 496.

<sup>21</sup> Second Statement, op. cit., p. 3.

He felt compelled to speak freely of the Apocrypha and sought to show that it was no part of the Word of God, but was opposed to it and inconsistent with it. He says:

It is enough for us to know that it is not the Word of God, to satisfy us that we do wrong, and commit sin, when we give it away to any of our fellow creatures, under the designation, or wearing on it the appearance of the Word of God.<sup>22</sup>

He argued that the idea that it was necessary to include the Apocrypha in order to get the Bible circulated was most erroneous in point of principle, and was not supported by fact. He was far from being hostile to the doctrine of expediency, when it was kept within proper and legitimate bounds. To his mind a good end should always be pursued by the most expedient means, but these means must be characterized by the same purity which characterizes the end.

Nothing is truly and ultimately expedient which implies a violation of the divine law; and even though it were to be attended with no injurious consequences, still we hold that no man is entitled, and that no enlightened Christian will feel himself at liberty, to adopt a method of accomplishing his object, which violates what is sacred, just, and true.<sup>23</sup>

Thomson asserted that the object of circulating the Bible was an aim of the highest kind and justified all the sacrifices that could be made for it, except the sacrifice of moral obligation. He accused the British and Foreign

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

Bible Society of misusing the funds that were entrusted to it by its faithful friends, when such contributions were used to circulate the Apocrypha.<sup>24</sup>

At the time when the "Second Statement" was penned, in 1826, the London Society had been circulating the Apocrypha, directly or indirectly, for a period of nearly twelve years, and this, according to Thomson, "in its most offensive forms."<sup>25</sup> To him the least offensive form in which they could have presented it to the public would have been that of a separate volume, though this would not have been a lawful use of the Society's funds or an expression of wise regard to the interest of religion. The London Society had not only bound the Holy Scriptures and the Apocrypha in the same volume, but they had given the Apocrypha to the Roman Catholics "intermingled with the Holy Scriptures," and thus represented it to them as pure and canonical.<sup>26</sup>

Another proposition which Thomson set forth was the contention that the Committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society "had shown the utmost unwillingness to relinquish the practice of circulating the Apocrypha, and to return to a conformity to the spirit, and the principle, of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 34-36.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-61.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 62.



the laws of the Institution."<sup>27</sup> He stated that the controversy would have ceased long ago if the London Committee, as soon as their error was detected and their conduct arraigned, had: freely and frankly acknowledged that they had been wrong; that they had acted inadvertently; that they had been misled by mistaken notions of the constitution of the society and by a belief that to circulate the Apocrypha was one of the best ways to circulate the Holy Scriptures; that, now being convinced of their mistake and as zealous as ever in the Bible cause, they would instantly follow a new course; labor to undo the evil which had been inflicted through their instrumentality; and henceforth act strictly according to the laws of the institution. The London Committee, however, had not done this and thus the controversy had been needlessly prolonged.

This "Second Statement" received extensive circulation throughout the country and,

. . . fell amongst the Philo-Apocryphists like the stroke of a tempest. By the Eclectic Reviewer it is described as having 'taken by surprise' the Committee, who 'were not prepared' for a proceeding so invidious and so malignant.<sup>28</sup>

As the controversy matured, it became more serious. Doubts were cast upon the canon of Scripture as those who

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>28</sup> Haldane, op. cit., p. 496.



were denounced for corrupting or adding to it were led to inquire whether these writings were exclusively inspired. Much of human infirmity entered into the conflict on both sides and "the House of the Lord was filled with smoke."<sup>29</sup> Numerous pamphlets, "like barbed and pointed, and sometimes, like poisoned arrows," were printed and circulated.<sup>30</sup>

To Thomson's evangelical mind and heart, there was no greater cause than that for which he was contending in this controversy -- the purity of the Word of God. He was a man of such strong convictions on what he deemed were the fundamental principles of the faith, that he allowed no personal comforts or private friendships to keep him from doing or saying what he felt to be necessary in order to defend the truth. Many bitter words were uttered by the controversialists on both sides of this debate; and in seeking to vindicate some of his own actions, Thomson said:

Zeal for the purity of God's word, and determined opposition to what would systematically corrupt it, may easily be mistaken for intemperance by those who look on the Apocryphal additions and intermixtures, with indifference of complacency.<sup>31</sup>

Henry F. Henderson comments thus:

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<sup>29</sup> Burns, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>30</sup> John Cunningham, The Church History of Scotland (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1882), Vol. II, p. 444.

<sup>31</sup> Second Statement, op. cit., p. 76.

The protagonist of this controversy was undoubtedly Dr. Andrew Thomson, 'a gladiator of the intellect,' as Edward Irving called him. He had a giant's strength, but he used it like a giant, as the pages of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor show; but he was, taking him all in all, among the greatest of his countrymen.<sup>32</sup>

Among the defenders of the conduct of the British and Foreign Bible Society were three religious periodicals of London: the Eclectic Review, the Congregational Magazine, and the Evangelical Magazine. Thomson exchanged many harsh words with the editors of these periodicals. In one article in the Eclectic Review, doubts were expressed as to the authenticity of ten Books of the Bible and a hundred and forty chapters of the Old Testament. Speaking of the writer of this article, Thomson says:

. . . he seems to glory in this departure from the faith which others hold; and, therefore, we can account for all his virulence and malignity against the individuals whom he is pleased to consider as the main instruments of staying that plague, which men of similar principles were letting loose on the Christian world . . . . Before this advocate for corrupting the word of God can be restored to the credit which he has lost in the esteem of every sound believer, it will be necessary for him to perform a lustration. But enough at present of this half-bred theologian, and a most miserable guide to public opinion.<sup>33</sup>

The Evangelical Magazine spoke of the Edinburgh Bible Society's "Second Statement" as "a statement partaking

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<sup>32</sup> Henderson, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

<sup>33</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 25, p. 313.

as much of the spirit of the world, and as little of the spirit of Christ, as any they ever read on a similar subject."<sup>34</sup> Thomson denies the truth of such statements and insists that it is most unreasonable for the editors of this magazine to direct their resentment, not against those who have done wrong, but against those who have detected it and sought redress. He calls upon them to be just in the cause of truth; and if they think the Edinburgh Committee wrong, they should state their convictions and produce facts to support their argument. Thomson contends that the "sting" of the "Second Statement" does not lie in what has been called its "spirit," but in the honesty of its charges; in the justness of its reasonings; in the undeniable certainty of its facts; in its address to the conscience of the offending party; and to the unwilling convictions of their friends and supporters.<sup>35</sup>

On one occasion the editor of the Evangelical Magazine referred to Thomson as:

The ardent Conductor  
Of the Edinburgh Instructor,<sup>36</sup>

In his reply, Thomson said that the editor "seems determined

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>35</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 390.

to convince us that if he has no reason, he at least has rhyme."<sup>37</sup>

Thomson's agitation against the "apocryphized" copies of the Scriptures not only spread over most of Scotland but many societies of England joined in denouncing the policy of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The author of the Life of Principal Harper says:

Dr. Thomson, carrying with him his great name and influence, held numerous public meetings all over Scotland, subjecting those who dared to oppose him, to his unsparring ridicule and withering invective. In many instances auxiliary societies were exploded by a single speech. The Edinburgh Bible Society grew out of this agitation.<sup>38</sup>

Describing one of Thomson's addresses, this writer says:

One of the most vivid recollections of our student days, is a speech which he delivered to an audience of four thousand, in one of the largest places of worship in Glasgow. For four hours, the densely-packed multitude sat or stood, listening with unflagging interest. The variety of his address was wonderful. Every quality was in it but tenderness -- nervous argument, masculine eloquence, skillfully arranged facts, clever anecdote admirably told, playful humour, wit that never missed fire, with the more questionable ingredients of bold assertion and reckless personality.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Thomson, Life of Principal Harper, (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, Second Edition, 1882), p. 82.

<sup>39</sup> Loc. cit.

In the year 1825, the Edinburgh Committee separated itself from the London Committee. There were, however, several members of the Edinburgh Committee who did not wholly agree with Thomson and dissented from this action.<sup>40</sup>

On March 16th, 1826, the Glasgow Committee suspended the sending of remittances to the London Society, thus separating itself from the parent organization.<sup>41</sup> Numerous Societies throughout England and Scotland followed the same procedure in expressing their disagreement with the London Society.

There can be no doubt that Thomson pushed some of the issues in this controversy much too far, and could have prevented some of the bitterness that resulted; but the results of his efforts were beneficial and lasting. A "pure" Bible was circulated from the societies of Britain and, after the anger of the controversy had subsided, Scotland's divided energies and sectional societies were united on a broad and unsectarian basis under the banner of the National Bible Society of Scotland. By 1880, this Society had become the third largest in the world; and had two hundred and fifty agents in seventeen countries engaged in

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<sup>40</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 28, p. 662.

<sup>41</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 25, p. 590.

the process of distributing the Bible, without the Apocrypha, to the people of the world. Their operations were, by this time, conducted with the harmony and cooperation of the Society in London.<sup>42</sup>

Thomson did not live to see this take place but it was the goal toward which he labored. The minutes of the Edinburgh Bible Society of the 4th of March, 1831, recorded the "deep sense of loss" which the Committee sustained by the death of Thomson. The Committee expressed their "unfeigned respect for his memory," and their "strong feeling of obligation for the inestimable service" which he rendered to the Society. They expressed their "admiration of the zeal he displayed for the circulation of the Bible throughout the world, and of the singular ability with which he conducted the business of the Society." They spoke of the success with which his unwearied labors were crowned in the "arduous struggle for the purity of the Holy Scriptures." The Committee regarded it as a "signal interposition of divine providence that a question of this magnitude was agitated by a man of such powerful and commanding talents, influenced by such high and unwavering principles."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Thomson, Loc. Cit., p. 86.

<sup>43</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 30, pp. 223-224.

## B. THE ANTI-PATRONAGE SOCIETY

The party in the church to which Thomson belonged had long attempted to defend the rights of the people in opposition to the rigorous enforcement of the law of patronage. Thomson believed that lay patronage had done much evil in Scotland and he attributed the secessions in the church directly to it.

He held that the Presbyterian form of church government did not allow any particular class of individuals to regulate the order of its rites, or to determine the choice of its ministers. Thomson was convinced that lay patronage, as it was exercised in the church, was incompatible with the design of a Presbyterian establishment.

Pure Presbyterianism supposes the election of its ministers to be sanctioned by the approbation of the people, and can in no way be reconciled to an institution that vests the patronage of the church in the hands of a few wealthy and powerful proprietors.<sup>44</sup>

Though he disliked the prevailing system of church patronage for many reasons, he admitted that it was difficult to say what was the best mode of settling pastors in vacant churches. In 1820 he said:

There is no question more difficult to answer, than where patronage in general ought to be lodged; and there

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<sup>44</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 20, p. 257.



can be no security that it shall always be used by any man or class of man.<sup>45</sup>

Thomson believed that if the patrons had paid as much regard to the doctrinal views of the people as was done by the heritors and elders under the Revolution Settlement, the question of patronage would never have divided either the church or the nation. He wrote:

Patronage became the ground of conflict, because the people, and those of the clergy who supported them, knew that if the congregations had anything to say in the settlement of ministers, they would uniformly, to the best of their judgment, fix on those who preached those doctrines which alone, in their opinion, were scriptural and for edification.<sup>46</sup>

He admitted that where the people had been allowed to choose their ministers, they had sometimes been injudicious in their choice; but he thought that no candid observer of the actual state of the church could fail to perceive that patrons had been equally unfortunate in the exercise of their right. Though their mistakes were somewhat different, they had proved indisputably that they were "not more unbiased in their judgments, not more considerate in their decisions, than the people, to whom they were so triumphantly preferred."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 19, p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>47</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 20, p. 261.

By 1824 Thomson's ideas on how to solve the problem of patronage had crystalized and he presented his plans in the pages of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor.<sup>48</sup>

On December 24, 1824, a meeting was held in the Waterloo Hotel in Edinburgh for the purpose of considering his plans for establishing an anti-patronage society.

The society was to be named The Society in Scotland for Improving the System of Patronage. Its leading purpose was "to place the right of Church patronage in the hands of . . . the male heads of families who are in full communion with the church."<sup>49</sup> The establishment of popular influence was not to be attempted at the expense of the existing rights of patrons. It was proposed, therefore, that funds should be raised by subscription for purchasing such patronages as may be offered for sale, in order that they could be settled according to the principles of the society. Every effort was to be made to introduce a similar system in the

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<sup>48</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 23, p. 774.

<sup>49</sup> Loc. cit.

It is interesting to note that some four years later the Scotsman newspaper (9/5/1829) advocated views similar to those which Thomson proposed: "Parliament should declare the crown patronages saleable on the application of the people either to heritors or elders, as before, or to heads of families . . . in parishes able to raise the necessary funds. This would place patronage in the hands of the most interested and best qualified to exercise it." Cowan, op. cit., p. 110.

exercise of those rights of patronage which could not be purchased.

Thomson believed that many patrons would be favorably influenced and that parishes would be incited to make exertions to raise the necessary funds for purchasing their respective patronages.

He thought of patronage as being property which could be bought and sold like any other, and which could be acquired by anyone who possessed the means and the inclination to purchase it. The society proposed "to go into market" when a patronage was offered for sale and "endeavor to secure honestly what, by the principle agreed upon, is a fair object of mercantile ambition."<sup>50</sup>

We do not intend to keep what we have thus obtained by fair competition: we intend to denude ourselves of the claim in a given time: it is our fixed purpose to vest the right of presentation in a certain description of the parishioners, who shall retain it forever as their own . . . . We are bound to hand over our patronages to the people.<sup>51</sup>

Thomson contended that patronage was as safe in the hands of the people as it could be in the hands of any individual.

For whatever may be their feelings and wishes, they cannot present anyone who is not a licentiate of the

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<sup>50</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 24, p. 119.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

church, and who is not found qualified by the presbytery of the bounds. They may be as wild and fanatical in their views of religion as a single patron can be moderate and rational in his, but still they are under the control both of civil and ecclesiastical law, and can only nominate and apply for the settlement of a qualified person.<sup>52</sup>

He disagreed with those who argued that the single patron was a better judge of the person to be presented than were the people.

The male communicants of the parish . . . who should be tolerably well instructed, if patrons and Presbyterians have done their duty, may be believed . . . to be more competent for deciding upon the merits and fitness of a presentee, than any gentleman can possibly be who lives, perhaps, hundreds of miles from the parish, and never sets a foot in it; who does not even belong to the religious communion whose spiritual concerns he is permitted so materially to affect; who is as ignorant of his Bible, as the horse on which he follows his hounds; and who cares no more either for the prosperity of our national church, or for the spiritual welfare of its members, than if there were no establishment and no religion in the country.<sup>53</sup>

Thomson believed, in the second place, that:

Whatever may be the comparative qualifications of two presentees considered in the abstract . . . when the people make their choice of one of them, they have at least the satisfaction of getting the one that is most to their mind, and by whom they are most likely to be edified, which is the grand purpose of a ministry--it being still understood that there is no incompatibility between high attainments in secular learning, and all that is most peculiar to the character of a Christian pastor.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>54</sup> Loc. cit.

Finally, Thomson was convinced that during that period in the history of the Church of Scotland when no minister was placed contrary to the will of the congregation, whether he was presented by a private patron, or by the heritors and elders:

The ministerial duties were, beyond all controversy, more diligently performed, the people more versant in scriptural theology, and there was, of peace, contentment, and loyalty among them, infinitely more than is to be found in modern times, when the church has enjoyed all the blessed effects of a system by which the vox populi is utterly despised, and everything is set at naught for the good pleasure of the patron, and the well-being of the presentee.<sup>55</sup>

Soon after his society was begun Thomson said:

The most sanguine supporters of the Institution never once insinuated, or breathed any hope of such a complete result as the total destruction of patronage, by the method to which they have had recourse . . . . All that they anticipate, or have attempted, is an amelioration of the present system, a removal of some portion of the existing evil, a fair transference, in such instances as come within their reach, of the right of appointing ministers from those hands in which they conceive it to be grossly and almost necessarily abused, into other hands, which are likely to manage it with more safety and more advantage to the cause of religion, and the welfare of the people. . . . we do not account it a good reason for desisting from any lawful purpose which involves the prosperity of Christ's Kingdom, that we are opposed by worldly men, whether they be men of rank or men of power, whether they be civil authorities or ecclesiastical politicians.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

The nature of his plan, which was to be gradual in operation, was calculated to remove those alarms which might be felt if any radical changes were attempted. If the purpose of the society was to be carried into effect, auxiliaries in other towns and parishes throughout the country had to be established.

Thomson's plan for the establishment of the society were promptly adopted and officers and directors were elected.<sup>57</sup> His speech on this occasion was a short one and primarily concerned the manner in which patronage was usually exercised and its effect on the people. He believed that too little consideration was given to the needs and desires of the people, and too often appointments were made to suit personal and private interests.<sup>58</sup>

One tragic effect of patronage was that it produced a large body of dissenters, but he rejoiced with those who had dissented in cases where their spiritual welfare was "sacrificed to political jobs and party ambition."<sup>59</sup> He avowed his love for his church but affirmed his greater love for the interests of religion and of the people. Speaking of

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<sup>57</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 24, pp. 46-57.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 53.



Thomson, in a funeral sermon, David Dickson said: "He loved our church with all the devotedness of attachment; but far more did he love the souls of perishing men."<sup>60</sup> Thomson himself said:

. . . I am glad to see such a proportion of our population so much alive to the greatest and most momentous of all concerns, and possessing so much love of Christian liberty, that they will not be doomed to take any person whatever that a careless, worldly, or profligate patron may choose to place over them, even though he is backed by a presbytery.<sup>61</sup>

He believed that the established church was better fitted than any other to promote the interests of religion and the spiritual well-being of the people, if its laws were faithfully administered and were not paralyzed by the system of patronage.

The indolence or irreligion of the churchman, will give birth to the dissenter; and thus to many, who look not to more remote causes, dissenterism seems to grow out of the abuses of the establishment. Let it not be forgotten, however, that it is to the prior zeal and christian activity of the establishment itself, that the dissenting church and minister owe their very existence.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 1, Sermon by David Dickson, p. 45.

<sup>61</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 24, p. 53.

<sup>62</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 28, p. 591.

Henderson quotes Thomson: "'Long have we slept in all the pomp of our civil establishment, while in our fields other sects have been reaping a plentiful harvest.'" G. D. Henderson, Heritage, A Study of the Disruption, Second Edition, Revised (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, Ltd., 1943), p. 63.



For this reason he was sorry that there were dissenters and he held it to be a grievance that such measures were adopted so as to produce them. It was Thomson's hope that this society would do much to diffuse the principles of justice regarding a subject so deeply involving the moral and religious interests of his church and country. He said:

Let the house of God be purged, and its vessels made clean, but not the temple itself be overthrown. An establishment is a permanent institution. A clergyman is only a life-renter on the estate.<sup>63</sup>

The anti-patronage society made no spectacular impact on the prevailing system of patronage, but it worked steadily and by the time of its founder's death in 1831, it had thirty-six auxiliaries throughout Scotland.<sup>64</sup>

It is perhaps unfortunate that Thomson did not have the cooperation of Thomas Chalmers in his efforts to abolish patronage. Professor Henderson points out the fact that:

Thomas Guthrie was strongly of the opinion that there might have been no Disruption had Andrew Thomson's anti-patronage views prevailed in time with the whole Evangelical Party, and especially with Chalmers . . . . Dr. Chalmers in particular was not prepared at this period, nor long afterwards, to support the attempt to abolish patronage . . . .<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 28, p. 591.

<sup>64</sup> E. C. I., Vol. 30, p. 143.

<sup>65</sup> Henderson, Heritage, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

## C. ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY

Thomson rose up to do battle, not only for the spiritual independence of the populace, but also for the physical liberty of all those whom God had created. His intense love of liberty brought him forth to champion the cause of the slaves in the West India colonies of Britain. He took an active part in the leadership of the Anti-Slavery Society of Edinburgh, and made known his views from the platform and in the pages of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor.

In an appendix to a volume of sermons published in 1830, he took up the question of the remedial measures proposed on behalf of that oppressed class of his fellow-subjects and, with his characteristic frankness, declared himself an advocate of immediate emancipation.<sup>66</sup>

He looked to the principles of morality and of the scriptures, and from them he learned that to hold a fellow creature in bondage was to violate the rule which dictated the same treatment of one's neighbor as one had a right to expect from him. To Thomson's mind, it appeared no less a

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew Thomson, Sermons on Various Subjects (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1830) 2nd Edition, p. 531.

This was in 1830, and it is interesting to note the change in his thinking. In 1817, Thomson thought gradual emancipation was the answer. ". . . immediate emancipation would be a measure fraught with greater cruelty and folly than can be easily calculated." E. C. I., Vol. 14, p. 327.

crime to assume a right of property in man in the tropics than it was to transfer that claim to the mother country and to extend it over all the sons of Britain.

For several years before Thomson's time the evils of a state of slavery had been denounced. Parliament, governed by the voice of the nation, had expressed its desire that an immediate stop should be put to the more glaring of these evils and had even recommended a course of ameliorating measures -- with a view to the ultimate extinction of the state of society which gave them birth. Years passed and comparatively little had been done. In some places the recommendations of the government had been met by expressions of contempt from the planters and by declarations of their right of property in their slaves. It was evident that the colonial legislatures and the planter were not readily disposed to remedy the evil situation; and Thomson conceived that it was a mere loss of time to entrust the measures of abolition to persons whose prejudices were in direct hostility to the views of parliament and of the country.

During the latter half of the year 1830, many public meetings were held throughout England and Scotland for the purpose of petitioning Parliament for the abolition of slavery.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The Anti-Slavery Reporter, Vol. IV, No. 2 (January, 1831), p. 25. (As found in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, Vol. 30, p. 882).

In October of that year two important meetings for that purpose were held in Edinburgh. Francis Jeffrey, Lord Advocate of Scotland, addressed the first of those meetings in an eloquent speech. He concluded his address by moving a series of resolutions on which it was proposed to found a petition to Parliament, pleading for the abolition of negro slavery at the earliest practicable period, and that all negro children born after the first of January, 1831, should be free.<sup>68</sup>

Thomson addressed the meeting in a powerful speech in which he praised the proposed resolutions as excellent, as far as they went, but objected to them as "not going far enough."<sup>69</sup> He thought the word "immediately" ought to be inserted in lieu of "The earliest practicable period"; the latter being in his opinion an expression which the enemies of emancipation would eagerly grasp, in order to delay emancipation to an indefinite period. He believed that for them "the earliest practicable period" would always be in the future tense. The slaveholders and colonial legislatures had been, and would be, glad to divert them from the main principle and do battle with them concerning expediency.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>70</sup> Loc. cit.

He further objected to the point in the resolutions which proposed to secure emancipation by declaring that all negro children born after the first of January, 1831, should be born free. He thought it was indirectly sanctioning the principle that those born before that period were lawfully kept in bondage. Viewing the case as a whole, he thought the meeting would not do justice to their own feelings, to the slaves, or to the country, unless they went boldly forward and told the legislature that they must have immediate emancipation. He did not recommend any violation of the constitution, or advocate the cause of anarchy; but he felt that they ought to tell the legislature, plainly and strongly, that no man had a title to property in man; and that there were eight hundred thousand individuals living in bondage under the intolerable evils of West India slavery, "who had as good a right to be free as they had; that they ought to be free and that they must be free."<sup>71</sup> He felt certain that if they went forward with a petition of this kind they would convince both the legislature and the West India interest that they were not to be put off any longer in this great claim of humanity and justice.

Thomson concluded his address by saying that he did not wish to divide the meeting by proposing any amendment to

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

the resolutions, but that he merely rose to state his sentiments on the subject. There were loud cries, however, from different quarters of the audience, of "move, move"; and he accordingly moved, as an amendment, that the word "immediately" should be inserted, and the proposition regarding children expunged.<sup>72</sup>

On the 19th of October, 1830, another important meeting of the Edinburgh Anti-Slavery Society was held. It was described by the Scotsman newspaper as "one of the largest and most respectable meetings we have ever seen in Edinburgh."<sup>73</sup> The audience consisted almost exclusively of the well-educated and the most intelligent ranks of society, and numbered about twelve hundred persons.

A petition to the legislature, on the principles of immediate emancipation, was read by Thomson and "supported," says the Scotsman newspaper, "by an address, which for clearness of statement, bold and masterly argument, and an eloquence that kept the feelings engaged in the conclusions arrived at, we have never heard surpassed."<sup>74</sup>

The newspaper further comments on the speech by saying:

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<sup>72</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>73</sup> Edinburgh Political and Literary Journal, Vol. XIV, No. 1125, October 20th, 1830.

<sup>74</sup> Loc. cit.

The manner of the Speaker was natural - having nothing of the preacher or barrister - his tone manly, and his language, in the higher passages, splendid, as well as forcible. It was more than gratifying to hear such a speech.

It was delightful to witness its effects on the audience, whose features were speedily radiating intelligence and glowing with feeling. The applause bestowed was often loud and long, and at the close the approving feelings were manifested in one grand burst of enthusiasm.

It was manifest from the depth and intensity of this impression, that it did not proceed exclusively from the interest excited for West India slaves, or indignation at their wrongs, but from the numerous appeals which had been made to their generous and manly feelings, and the ardent love of general liberty, and the hatred of oppression in all its forms, which pervaded the address.<sup>75</sup>

Thomson's address on this occasion is described in a letter from the Rev. William Cousins to Miss Jean L. Watson:

I have heard the greatest orations of Chalmers and Candlish and Cunningham and Guthrie, each so different, but, judged by immediate practical effect, in feeling and in act, even from them I have never heard anything superior to that magnificent oration, the greatest and last, of Dr. Andrew Thomson. Under its potent spell Edinburgh was the first city in Britain to sound the watchword, soon caught up over all the land, and acted on by the Legislature, of absolute and immediate emancipation for every slave within the British empire.<sup>76</sup>

Sir Henry Moncrieff says that:

He (Thomson) manifested his command over the minds and hearts of his countrymen in general . . . by the manner in which he directed public opinion away from a

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<sup>75</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>76</sup> Watson, op. cit., p. 114.



previous disposition towards a gradual emancipation of the West India slaves, into a rush of sentiment in favour of an immediate and entire abolition of their bondage. That oratorical exertion was an incident not to be forgotten by those who heard him during the remainder of their lives.<sup>77</sup>

In speaking of this speech, W. M. Hetherington in his History of The Church of Scotland, says that Thomson's "eloquence rose to a pitch of grandeur and sublimity such as has been rarely excelled."<sup>78</sup>

Henry Cockburn spoke of it as a "powerful speech" after which Thomson and his friends "carried everything their own way."<sup>79</sup>

Thomson began his address by reading the petition which had been prepared by the Committee of the Edinburgh Anti-Slavery Society, and then proceeded to explain the term "immediate." He considered the word "immediate," as he had used it in his amendment to the petition, a strong word, but it was in contrast with the word "gradual." It was to be considered and understood under the direction of common sense and as modified and expounded by those statements with which it had been associated in the petition. He believed

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<sup>77</sup> Henry W. Moncrieff, The Free Church Principle (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1884), p. 200.

<sup>78</sup> Hetherington, op. cit., p. 377.

<sup>79</sup> Henry Cockburn, Memorials of his Time (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1856), p. 469.

that immediate abolition was not merely an intelligible phrase, but one which did not warrant the alarm which had been aroused because of it.

The petition for immediate abolition of the slaves was founded on the principle that man could not hold property in man. Thomson said:

That man cannot hold property in man is a proposition which is self-evident: it does not bear an argument: and he who maintains it, must be prepared to admit, that if the white man can hold property in the black man, the black man can hold property in the white man -- a doctrine which, as soon as it is carried into operation, breaks up the whole frame of society, and reduces all things to absolute anarchy and confusion.<sup>80</sup>

His condemnation of slavery and his effective powers of oratory were brought to bear directly on the subject when he said:

Slavery is hostile to the original and essential rights of our common humanity -- contrary to the inflexible and paramount demands of moral justice -- at eternal variance with the spirit and maxims of revealed religion -- inimical to all that is merciful in the heart, and holy in the conduct -- and on these accounts, necessarily exposed and subject to the curse of Almighty God.<sup>81</sup>

By engaging in a system possessing such characteristics, the nation was sinning in the sight of God, and an

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<sup>80</sup> Andrew Thomson, Substance of the Speech Delivered at the Meeting of the Edinburgh Society for the Abolition of Slavery (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1830), p. 3. (as found in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, Vol. 1).

<sup>81</sup> Loc. cit.

overwhelming responsibility was laid upon the Christian Church. The guilt did not merely consist in making men slaves, but was just as great in keeping them slaves.

Thomson said:

. . . if it be unlawful, iniquitous, and unchristian, to steal a man and force him into bondage, it must be equally unlawful, iniquitous, and unchristian, to retain him in that state, whether he has been purchased, or received as a gift, or got by inheritance . . . . To make or keep him a slave is to violate that charter of liberty which God has given to every human being whom he has made. Justice and humanity equally reclaim against such a robbery of inherent right.<sup>82</sup>

The fact that slavery was a crime was beyond the reach of controversy. To engage in it, or to persist in it, was to contract guilt in the sight of heaven and, being aware of this, the people of Britain were to make no delay in "hastening out of the transgression," and putting an end to it wherever it had obtained a foothold in the dominions.<sup>83</sup>

Thomson did not feel it necessary to go into the details of the slave system in his speech, or to prove its evils by special instances of cruelty and oppression. He did not doubt that many individuals among the slave-holders showed consideration and kindness towards those who were subjected to their authority, nor did he suppose that all of them endeavored to make their slaves as comfortable and

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Loc. cit.

happy as slaves could be. He did not press upon the slaveholders an unqualified sweeping sentence of condemnation, but was willing to allow that there had been some unintentional mistakes and willful exaggerations in reporting the instances of atrocity. He did not think it was fair to picture certain scenes of severe exaction and tyrannical punishment, and then to assert that such were only examples of what was happening every day in every section of the West Indies. He did, however, draw attention to the miserable condition of the slaves themselves in order to support his argument for immediate emancipation.<sup>84</sup>

Thomson could not agree with those who held that the system of slavery should be mitigated, and that a course of amendment should be pursued with a view to its final abolition. Parliament had attempted to follow such a course and had failed, because the slave-holders felt that any plans of amelioration were an invasion of their rights of property.

The slaves, they say, are their property. Once admit this -- and so long as slavery is permitted to exist under the sanction of Parliament, you do admit it -- once admit this and your whole arguments for interference are vain, and all your plans for amelioration are fruitless. The whole question may be said to hang upon this point. If the slaves are not property, then slavery is at an end.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-9.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

He would not deny that the evils of practical slavery could be lessened; but with all that could be accomplished by amelioration, the nature of slavery itself could not be altered. Men would still be in bondage and considered as property by other men.

Mitigate and keep down the evils as much as you can, still it is there in all its native virulence, and still it will do its malignant work in spite of you . . . . You have not reached the seat and vital spring of the mischief . . . . Its essence remains unchanged and untouched, and is ready to unfold itself whenever a convenient season arrives . . . in those manifold acts of injustice and inhumanity, which are its genuine and invariable fruits. You may white-wash the sepulchre -- you may put upon it every adornment that fancy can suggest -- you may cover it over with all the flowers and evergreens that the garden or fields can furnish, so that it will appear beautiful outwardly unto men. But it is a sepulchre still -- full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness . . . slavery is the very Upas tree of the moral world, beneath whose pestiferous shade all intellect languishes and all virtue dies . . . if you would get quit of the evil, you must go more thoroughly and effectually to work . . . . The foul sepulchre must be taken away. The cup of oppression must be dashed to pieces on the ground. The pestiferous tree must be cut down and eradicated; it must be, root and branch of it, cast into the consuming fire, and its ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven.<sup>86</sup>

He was convinced that the spirit and genius of Christianity frowned upon slavery as a system of rebellion against God. To him the spirit of the gospel was a spirit of liberty and extended to all departments of human life; and he had no patience with those who attempted to justify slavery on

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

Biblical grounds. He contended that there was no such justification for it whatsoever.<sup>87</sup>

After years of watching the progress of the efforts toward emancipation of the slaves, Thomson considered that no confidence could be placed in the Parliament, or the Government, on this point. He placed his confidence in the public feelings of Great Britain and Ireland. The reasons he gave for his lack of trust in Parliament were based on the weak and ineffective resolutions which had been passed from time to time, with no satisfying results.<sup>88</sup> He did not believe that anything of lasting value could be expected from them unless there was strong constitutional pressure exerted from without, and unless the united voice of the peoples of the empire was raised in favor of immediate emancipation.

It is our duty to knock, and never cease knocking, on the doors of the Parliament and the Ministry till we prevail upon them -- till we compel them by constitutional means . . . to grant what we demand, and what we deem absolutely necessary on the grounds of religion, justice, humanity, and everything that is most dear and precious in the estimation of man -- I mean the immediate and total abolition of colonial slavery.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-24.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

**PART III**

**ANDREW THOMSON: AN EVALUATION OF HIS  
CONTRIBUTION TO THE CHURCH AND THE  
EVANGELICAL REVIVAL IN SCOTLAND**



When Thomson came to the scene as minister of the Church of Scotland, the general atmosphere was cold and indifferent; when he died in 1831, the spirit of religious revival was sweeping across his native land. His influence upon this revival is well demonstrated in every phase of his life and work.

Serving as an able and distinguished minister, as editor of an influential evangelical periodical, and party leader in the Church, he rendered a twofold service to evangelical religion. He took away the reproach from what had been called the narrow, the pietistic, the fanatical party, and formed a strong Evangelical body to face the Moderate ranks. He gathered and marshalled the younger men in the church who were willing to fight for spiritual independence and Christian rights inside the establishment.

The emphasis which the Evangelicals placed on the Bible and their loyalty to a particular tradition of Biblical interpretation provided the foundation on which they based their preaching and their appeal to the masses. The vitalizing power of Evangelicalism was derived from an experimental awareness of two profound theological doctrines: the doctrine of Atonement and the doctrine of the testimonium internum Spiritus. This emphasis pervaded all of Thomson's activity

and moulded the distinguishing characteristics of his personality.

He was resolute and unflinching in seeking to maintain the spiritual independence of the Church and the rights of Christian people. The influence of this emphasis by Thomson was felt all over Scotland and was demonstrated in his stand on the patronage issue; the forming of the Society for Improving the System of Church Patronage; his leadership of the debate on the Little Dunkeld case in the General Assembly; and his opposition to orders from civil councils affecting the modes of worship.

His zeal in promoting the religious culture and intellectual improvement of the people, a characteristic which was not so pronounced in the earlier evangelicals, served to render the Evangelical Revival more acceptable in certain areas of society. His preaching had a powerful effect for good on the cultured people of Edinburgh; and his efforts on behalf of the Education Committee of the Church greatly benefited many people throughout Scotland, especially in the Highlands and Islands. The influence exerted by his magazine, The Edinburgh Christian Instructor, was felt not only throughout Scotland, but in England as well. Thomson also served the people of his land through the numerous philanthropic societies of the day.

He possessed an uncompromising enmity against all corruptions and abuses, and exerted an enormous influence for good on behalf of the slaves of the West Indian Colonies. The energy expended in the Apocrypha Controversy resulted in the circulation of a "pure" Bible and correcting what he deemed to be one of the greatest possible corruptions of the Holy Scriptures.

His intense love of liberty was reflected in most of his activities, and found concrete expression in his efforts on behalf of the slaves and the members of the established church who were suffering under the yoke of patronage. He had a burning hatred of tyranny and arbitrary powers, and would permit no infringement on the Church's rights.

Thomson was a reformer and often his controversial writings reflect that character. A careful analysis of his speeches and his writings reveal that their distinctive feature is their powerful and sifting argumentation. His aim often appeared to be to find and refute error, and in the passion of debate he sometimes spoke and wrote more severely and harshly than the occasion warranted. He sometimes crossed the boundry line of fair debate; he occasionally took an exaggerated view of his subject, and too often penned unguarded expressions in regard to those with whom he differed. It may be said that considering the stirring nature of the warfare

in which he was engaged, and the fact that an ardent temper seems to be an inseparable element in a mind fitted for enterprises of noble daring, some of his actions were not surprising, but are by no means to be commended. He has been compared with Luther, and Knox, and Melville; and despite his occasional injudicious conduct, he greatly helped to bring his Church to a renewed awareness of her protestant heritage.

## APPENDIX

The following epitaph appears on the head stone of Thomson's grave, which is located in the churchyard of St. John's Episcopal Church, Princes Street, Edinburgh, on ground which was formerly a part of St. Cuthbert's churchyard:

To The Memory of

ANDREW THOMSON, D.D.

Who, after a life devoted  
to the honour of his Master,  
and the best interests of mankind,  
died 9th February, 1831; aged 53;

A man adorned with the highest gifts  
and graces of a Christian minister:  
quick and penetrating intellect;  
learning, eloquence, piety, zeal,  
fidelity, courage, tenderness;

This tablet is erected in testimony of  
their admiration of his public character  
and private virtues, and of his constant and zealous labours  
in the cause of pure religion  
and universal benevolence, and as a memorial of  
their affectionate remembrance,  
and grateful sense,  
of the benefits enjoyed,  
under his ministry and friendly counsel,  
during the seventeen years  
by the kirk session and congregation of  
St. George's Church, of which he was the faithful and beloved pastor.

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